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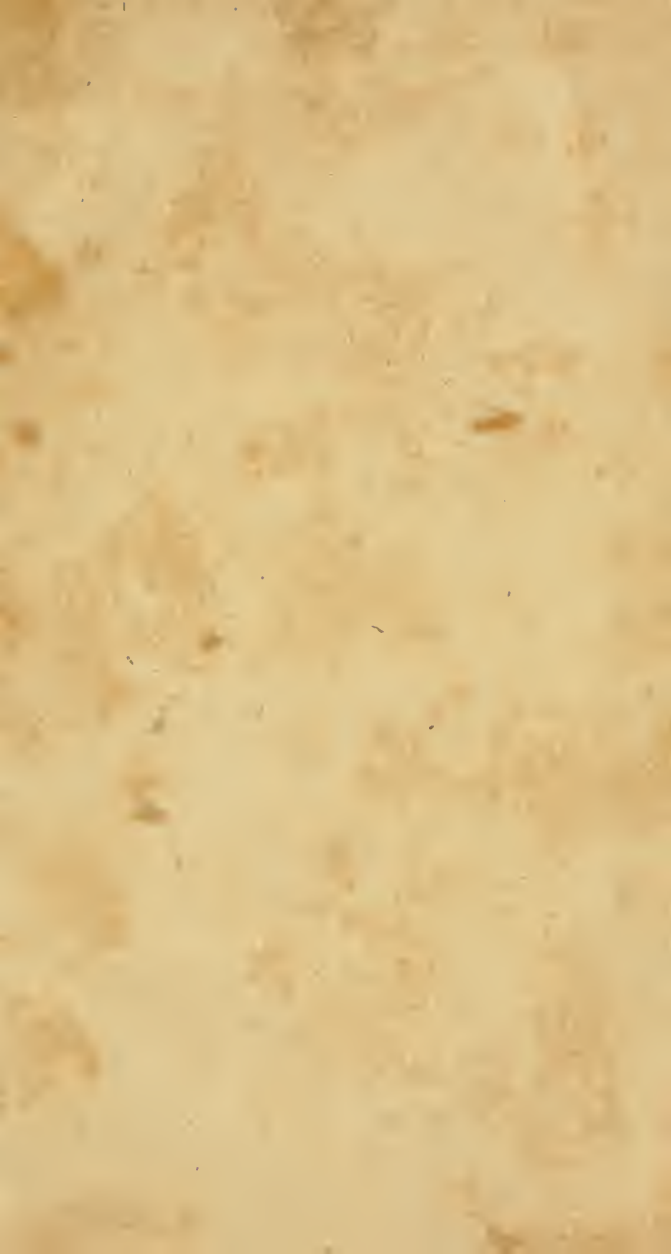
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A vindication of the
Presbyterian form of church









A
VINDICATION
OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN FORM
OF
CHURCH-GOVERNMENT,
AS
PROFESSED IN THE STANDARDS
OF THE
Church of Scotland;
IN REPLY TO
THE ANIMADVERSIONS
OF THE
ANCIENT AND MODERN INDEPENDENTS
IN
A SERIES OF LETTERS.

By JOHN BROWN,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, LANGTON.

SECOND EDITION.

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## THE PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

*THE flattering manner in which the First Edition of this Work was received by the Christian world, has encouraged the Publisher to bring forward a second ; and, he flatters himself, that in doing so, he engages in an undertaking which will be equally acceptable and useful. The subject which Mr. Brown handles, is of very considerable importance at any time : it is especially interesting in the present day ; and the fulness and ability with which he has treated it, must give his performance a strong claim on the attention not only of those who hold the same general principles which he so powerfully maintains, but of those also who hold a different system. The former it provides with a clear and accurate statement of the reasonings, by which their opinions on Church Government are to be justified to their own minds, and defended against the attacks or insinuations of others : while, to the latter, it affords a body of argument, which, though it may prove insufficient to change their views, is yet unquestionably entitled to their impartial and attentive consideration. The controversy, indeed, between Presbyterians and Independents, is not quite so vehement in its spirit as it was when Mr. Brown's Work was originally published : but it still exists both in a speculative and a practical form ; and perhaps this production may be more serviceable than at the period of its first appearance, in determining the merits of that controversy, now that mens' minds are less heated by passion, and better qualified to take a calm view of whatever is stated on either side, while yet they are not so much cooled as to be in any measure indifferent to the issue of the question. On these accounts, the Publisher hopes that the New Edition of Mr. Brown's Vindication of Presbytery, will be favourably received by all those who take an interest in the topics which it professes to discuss, and to whom, from the complete exhaustion of the first impression, it has for a long while been almost inaccessible.*

## The Reviewers of this valuable Publication speak thus:—

“WE are glad to see a second edition of Mr. Brown’s work, and cheerfully embrace the opportunity now afforded us, of stating the opinion which we are disposed to entertain of its merits, and of recommending it to the attention and perusal of our readers. We may observe, in general, that it is extremely valuable, both for the matter which it contains, and for the manner in which it is executed; that it is by far the ablest work of the kind which we have met with; and that it may be read with great advantage, not only by those whose sentiments it supports, but even by those whose sentiments it opposes.

“Mr. Brown has given us a very full and very dispassionate treatise;—full, without being tedious; and dispassionate, without being tame and insipid. He has given us what Warburton, laying aside his Episcopalian prejudices, would have called a “well-reasoned and judicious” performance. Instead of filling his pages with mere declamation, which is so easy and so useless; or of indulging in retorts and reproaches, to which he had ample provocation; or of amusing us with attempts at wit and humour, which are too often most unwarrantably employed to break the force of truth; or of diverting our thoughts from the main point, by introducing those extraneous remarks, which are frequently resorted to, in order to conceal a poverty of argument;—he has set the subject fairly and distinctly before him, he has followed it closely through all its windings, in the spirit of calm steady investigation, and never allowed himself to be tempted either by caprice or by difficulty, to deviate from the course which he has wisely chosen. Throughout the whole, our author has shewn himself to be well fitted for the task which he has undertaken. We see evident tokens of a very accurate and extensive knowledge of the controversy in which he has engaged—an attainment the more difficult, on account of the variety of forms assumed by the Independent churches. We observe great acuteness in discerning both the weak and the strong points of his opponents’ reasonings, and great skill in exposing the one, and in overturning the other. We remark a display of learning, which could only be acquired by a patient study of the original scriptures, and a laborious research into the writings of the fathers; and what is of still greater moment, our author seems to have a precise understanding of the learning which he brings forward, and makes a fair and happy application of it to the various propositions which he is desirous to illustrate, or to establish. But that which strikes us as chiefly characteristic of his controversial talent in this case, is the coolness and intrepidity with which he encounters every argument, and every objection that is urged by the other side. He shews no disposition to evade a single point, the consideration of which is essential or conducive to a

full and impartial discussion of the question. There is not a strong hold of Independency, however well fortified, against which he does not advance, and there is not a position on the ground of Presbytery, however fiercely attacked, which he does not defend, with the most undaunted courage, and the most perfect composure. Most other controvertists, when they are strongly opposed, become afraid, and shrink from the combat; when they meet with difficulties, they get disconcerted, and run off to smoother ground; when they see formidable preparations for receiving them, they are discouraged, and stand aloof. Mr. Brown is never afraid of opposition—never disconcerted by difficulties,—never deterred by the appearance of resistance and danger.—In every part and stage of the controversy, he is cool, collected, and unshaken. Nor does this proceed, as his opponents may perhaps allege, from a blind and presumptuous confidence in his own prowess. We observe no symptoms of such a temper. But we see very well, that our author has a clear and comprehensive view of the field in which he contends—that he is conscious of possessing a decided superiority, both in the goodness of his cause, and in the efficacy of the means which he has for maintaining it—and that nothing, in addition to these, but prudence, fortitude, and perseverance, appear to him to be necessary for ensuring ultimate success.

“That Mr. Brown has actually and completely succeeded, we are perfectly satisfied. Independents, it is true, will hold a different opinion of the result; and we shall never be so arrogant or uncharitable, as to impute this to any thing but a want of that conviction in their minds, which Mr. Brown’s volume was intended to produce. We shall not, however, think them entitled to much credit for their judgment or their candour, if they do not allow, both that our author’s weapons are powerful, and that he has wielded them with peculiar force and skill. Such a concession is so obviously reasonable, that very few, we are persuaded, will refuse to make it.”—*Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, No. 17.

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“We are acquainted with no work in our language on this subject, which embraces such a variety of topics—brings forward such a mass of information—exhibits such cogent arguments—or contains such a minute examination of objections, both from reason and scripture, as the one now before us: Nor do we think many will, after carefully and candidly perusing it, deny that it is a treatise of merit, and does great credit to its author. Even Independents, however much they may feel some of the pointed reproofs, and stubborn facts which are presented to them, will acknowledge, that it deserves their most serious and attentive study.”—*Religious Monitor*, No. 89, page 190.

## INTRODUCTION.

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THE following Letters were originally intended as a Reply to Mr. Innes only. On farther reflection, however, it appeared to be proper, not to restrict these inquiries to a review of that writer's sentiments, but to consider also what had been said by the more ancient and able advocates for Independency. In our researches after truth, it should always be our concern to know *what* is said, and not merely *who* says it; and certainly Independents cannot object, if, in examining what has been advanced by their present champions, we likewise consider the more learned and ingenious arguments of their enlightened predecessors.

It is requested to be remarked, that it is *the principles* only, and not *the practices* of Presbyterians that are here defended. The advocate for Presbytery is certainly no more bound to vindicate the latter, in order to establish the former, than the advocate for Christianity is bound to prove that the conduct of Christians is blameless and praise-worthy, in order to shew that Christianity is divine. It is Presbytery alone as exhibited in the scriptures for which we here contend, and it is on this ground alone that we can impartially review and compare it with Independency.

Let it be further considered, that if the errors which appear in the conduct of Presbyterians, with regard to government, are better known than those of Independents, it is owing, in a great measure, to the superior publicity of their courts. While none but members are allowed to attend the meetings of the latter, and while the strictest secrecy marks their proceedings in general, none are commonly prohibited from hearing the deliberations of the former. If the mistakes of Presbyterians then are more gene-



rally known than those of Independents, it arises from a circumstance which has ever been admitted to be a very important excellence in civil courts ; namely, that their proceedings are usually conducted in the presence and hearing of all, even though not connected with their societies, while the transactions of Independents are carried on in private, and are carefully concealed from the inspection of the world.

That instances of very lawless oppression have occurred among our Tabernacle Independents in Scotland, even during the short time that they have already existed, is attempted to be proved, Letter II. These instances are taken either from the writings of those who represent themselves as aggrieved, and whose statement has never been refuted by their opponents, or from the writings of those who were guilty of the oppression, and have acknowledged their fault. And, perhaps, had their courts been as open to the public as those of Presbyterians, we should have heard of a still greater number of acts of tyranny and injustice.

To allow the office-bearers to decide on any point, when the members of their congregations have not been previously consulted, has always been affirmed by former Independents to be a display of ecclesiastical despotism in Presbyterians. In the Letter however to which we have referred, it is endeavoured to be proved, that, in *many* instances, Mr. Ewing contends for this very power ; and consequently, at least on their acknowledged principles, the constitution of his church, to a certain extent, must be viewed as a *spiritual despotism*.

It is attempted, moreover, to be demonstrated in these Letters, that the scheme of these writers, by rendering every congregation in the church of Christ independent of the rest, exhibits such a view of his kingdom as would be presented of the civil and political world, were it broken into as many independent governments as there were towns or villages on the face of the earth, and their governors were obliged

uniformly to consult the inhabitants before they could perform any act of authority.

That the author, in every instance, should accurately have stated the sentiments of Independents, is what he by no means pretends. As each of their congregations is independent of the rest, it is possible that there may be as many creeds and constitutions among them as there are churches on the earth. But to think of representing accurately the sentiments of all of them, amidst this *possible* variety, would certainly be a vain and ridiculous idea, especially as most of them account it a sin to write and publish these creeds to the world. He is conscious however, that he has not wilfully, in any instance, mis-stated their views; and if those, whose opinions are here examined, can point out any case in which he has not fairly exhibited them, he will most readily correct it.

Let it not be said, that the reasonings in these Letters cannot be admitted to be conclusive, because many Independents do not, as is here asserted, allow their members a right to vote upon every question. It is of little importance to differ about words. All Independents; (Mr. Ewing excepted) ask the judgment and consent of their members upon *every* matter, before the office-bearers can pronounce a decision: and if so, the arguments which are here adduced, are equally conclusive as upon the former supposition.

Let it be understood farther, that the arguments advanced will not be considered as overturned though a number of mistakes should be pointed out in separate and detached observations, unless the body of the evidence be fairly met, and fully overthrown. It will much less be considered as at all affected if encountered only by wit and humour, a weapon of which some advocates for Independency seem to be peculiarly fond. It is from conviction alone that the author of these Letters has published his sentiments, and when an opposite conviction is produced, by dispassionate, and able, and scriptural reasoning, he

will instantly renounce them. He has no wish that Presbytery should be retained any farther than it can be supported by scripture, and the moment that it is proved that it cannot so be supported, he will be happy to see that it is rejected by the world.

It is of little importance for the public to know, that these Letters were written amidst many avocations, and at considerable intervals. It is mentioned only as an apology for any inaccuracies of style, or repetitions of sentiment, which may occur in the perusal of them. This, however, is the only indulgence for which he pleads. He asks none in behalf of the argument. He wishes it fully and impartially to be examined, and will endeavour candidly to consider the objections which are offered to his reasonings, if stated in the spirit of Christian meekness, and not with that virulence which shews only how strongly an individual smarts under a sense of inconsistency, or how keenly he is devoted to the purposes of a party.

The author originally intended to examine likewise the argument for Separation from the Church of Scotland, drawn from what have been called its corruptions: but of this, his present avocations will not admit. He shall probably however be induced to complete his design, as soon as he can command the leisure and time which it must necessarily require. And, till some fuller treatise be published, he begs leave to recommend to the perusal of his readers, Ferguson (of Kilwinning) on Independency and Schism; and a valuable pamphlet by a late eminent Minister, entitled, Thoughts on Modern Divisions.

The publication of these sheets has been delayed for some time, that the Second Appendix, containing a Review of Mr. Haldane's book on Social Worship, as far as relates to the subject of Government, might accompany the Letters.

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VINDICATION  
OF THE  
PRESBYTERIAN FORM  
OF  
CHURCH GOVERNMENT;

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS TO MR. INNES.

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LETTER I.

SIR,

It is with the utmost reluctance that I address you on the subject of your late publication. Sensible of the evils which have often resulted to the cause of Christ from religious controversies, and from controversies especially of inferior importance, I am sorry that an opportunity should again be afforded to the enemies of religion to triumph at the increasing animosities and dissensions of her friends. Conscious also of the necessity of mutual forbearance, to promote among Christians that universal charity which is "the bond of perfectness," I cannot behold without the deepest regret, charges the most awful and momentous, exhibited by one body of Christians against another, though equally attached to the same blessed cause; charges which, from their peculiar character, are not less destructive of those pleasures and advantages which flow from the cultivation of private intercourse, than totally incompatible with public fellowship.

Extraordinary as was the manner in which you were led to change your views of the Establishment\*, and strong

\* See Letter III. p. 27, in which you admit that it was in consequence of an inquiry begun upon your being offered another situation in your present connection, that you finally determined to leave the Church of Scotland. Whether such also was the security of your brother Mr. Ballentine, before he renounced his Presbyterian connection, I do not pretend to say. I consider it however as surprising, that *for many years* before he had renounced his

as may have been your convictions of the propriety of that measure, it appeared to me particularly unbecoming in *you*, or any of *your* brethren, to discover such keenness in your opposition to that Establishment as you have lately manifested. It was the avowed design of a celebrated society \*, of which many of you are members, and which may justly be considered as the parent of your churches, to disseminate the gospel where the means of instruction were not enjoyed, or, in your apprehension, not enjoyed in purity, and not to form a party for *Independents*, by dividing the congregations of faithful ministers, either among the Dissenters or in the Establishment †. You ought certainly to have considered also, that the more formidable the charges which you bring forward against it are, the more striking is your own inconsistency, in granting the highest and most valued privileges of your church to persons while remaining in this very society,

profession as a Presbyterian, or even his studies, in the view of becoming a Presbyterian minister, he should tell us, that “he had clearly seen from the word of God, that churches of Christ should consist only of *converted persons*, and that their government should be what is called *congregational*,” or independent, and yet have remained a Presbyterian. See p. 19. of his Observations.

\* That for propagating the gospel at home.

† That such was the original profession of this society, is evident from the regulations which they delivered to their itinerant preachers and catechists, and which, so far as I know, they have never yet publicly retracted. In the 2d and 3d of these, it is declared, that “these itinerants are not to shew a preference to *any* denomination of Christians, either *established* or *dissenting*, but exhort the people to attend *wherever the gospel is preached in purity*. And to endeavour to *strengthen* the hands of *all* faithful ministers of Jesus Christ, of *whatever* denomination.” See Appendix to Haldane’s Address. If such liberal sentiments however were the *genuine sentiments* of this society, and have uniformly been adhered to by its itinerants and catechists, how can it be explained, that in every instance where they succeeded in procuring a congregation, that congregation has *invariably* become an Independent church? And especially, since you, and Messrs. Haldane and Ewing, are so zealous members and patrons of this society, I should be glad to know upon what principle you can vindicate your present conduct, in writing with such vehemence against faithful ministers, both *established* and *dissenting*, while, as connected with this society, you are *still* solemnly declared to be publicly associated, “to *strengthen* their hands and encourage their people to wait upon their labours, and to enjoin all to shew no greater partiality for themselves than for them !”



if you were satisfied as to the rectitude of their principles and practice\*.

It is undeniable however, that such charges have been advanced by you against it. You yourself insinuate (p. 116), in terms the most decided, that it is no longer entitled to the character of *a church of Christ*. And your brother Mr.

\* Reprehensible as is the practice of *mixed communion*, as granted occasionally to the members of other religious societies by some of our Dissenters, it seems to be doubly so upon the principles of *your churches*. You consider the Church of Scotland in particular, as will instantly be proved, as an image of Antichrist, if not Antichrist itself. But what pleasure can you experience, when you sit down to participate of your feast of love with men whom you regard as supporters of this adversary of the blessed Saviour? or what satisfaction can they feel, when they reflect that they are joining in this delightful exercise with persons who, whatever attachment they profess, ascribe to them, in another view, this dreadful character? If I am not misinformed too, it has not been uncommon among you to admit those to occasional communion, whom afterwards, when they applied for stated membership with the very same views, you would not receive. But where, Sir, is your warrant either from scripture or reason, for denying the latter, which does not introduce to ordinances more solemn, or privileges more important, to persons to whom you would not scruple to grant the former? Yet while you have imparted at first this privilege with the utmost cheerfulness to those pious persons who occasionally applied for it, you have been known in many instances, if they persisted in their applications, to remonstrate with them on what you denominated *the inconsistency* of their conduct, and most assiduously to insist that they would become *stated* members. Does an act however, which, in your opinion, may be performed without inconsistency for *eight or ten times*, become inconsistent if more *frequently repeated*? And does not the solicitude which you discover, and the importunity which you employ, to prevail with those who are occasional communicants to become stated members, disclose a design rather of converting this solemn and invaluable privilege into a mean of *increasing your own societies*, than of promoting the *mutual love* of Christians? And, in short, according to the principles of your different societies, every individual, who is admitted as a member, is entitled as a virtual, though not a nominal ruler, to judge and vote in the affairs of the church. If then, according to your uniform practice, you allow a member of the Church of England, or a member from our Establishment or the Presbyterian Dissenters, when you are satisfied at once with his faith and piety, to eat with you occasionally the sacrament of the supper, upon what grounds, I demand, could you refuse this person, even while he remained an *Episcopalian*, or *Presbyterian*, a right also to *administer occasionally* in your *Independent* congregations as an ecclesiastical ruler?

Ewing, in a late very extraordinary paper respecting Vows (see *Missionary Magazine* for January 1804, p. 6.), after quoting Rev. xiii. 16, 17. "And he caused all, both small  
 "and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark  
 "in their right hand, or in their foreheads : and that no man  
 "might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name  
 "of the beast, or the number of his name,"—introduces, in page 36, a note from the annotations of the Geneva translators, explanatory of the mark of the beast ; and then subjoins, "How happy should we be that we are happily delivered from so many of the abuses mentioned above ; and  
 "that, through the lenity of the government under which  
 "we live, any man is at liberty to reject them all ! No class  
 "of men ought to be more sensible of the value of our civil  
 "constitution than Christians, who cannot in conscience hold  
 "communion with a *national* church. In these times, and  
 "in *this country*, we may refuse to be sealed with *Anti-*  
 "*christ's* mark, and be nevertheless suffered to live among  
 "men." Here it is plain, that he considers even the strongest of these names, which have hitherto been viewed as appropriated to that church which is called in scripture, "The  
 "mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth," as applicable also to our national church. She too, it seems, in his opinion, is *the beast* mentioned in this passage ; and consequently, according to the description of *this* Antichrist, must sit *in the place of God*, and *exalt herself above all which is called God* : and of her also it may be affirmed (however contradictory to fact), that she has made *all nations* to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornications, and has deceived them who dwell upon the earth *by the lying miracles* which she has pretended to perform !!! How strange indeed, that persons who are such sticklers for purity of communion, should receive to occasional fellowship the *followers* of this *beast*, and supporters of this Antichrist—the members, in short, of this church, which *cannot* be considered as a church of Christ ! How still more astonishing is it, that men, who glory so much in their candour and charity, should apply to our Establishment the titles of a church, not one of the awful characteristics of which, whether as already stated, or more fully described in the sacred volume, either can be ascribed to her in themselves, or were ever hitherto ascribed to her in the same ex-

tent, even by her most inveterate enemies\*. See an admirable refutation of this paper on Vows, and a detection of some radical and important errors on which the scheme of

\* I must here except Dr. C. Stuart, who, after leaving the Establishment, in 1777 published a most violent invective against it, in the form of a sermon. In it he attempts to trace a resemblance between our church and Antichrist, which is represented in the Revelation, as a woman sitting upon a scarlet-coloured beast, with seven heads and ten horns. It is remarkable, however, that while he selects certain circumstances in which he imagines there is a similarity, he omits others far more important and distinctive, in which even his ingenuity could not discover the slightest degree of coincidence. It is evident also, that to point out a resemblance in a few particulars, admitting that he has succeeded, will not warrant the application of this name to the Establishment. Some things which are very good, resemble others which are bad, in a number of circumstances; and yet it cannot be inferred from this, that they are evil. A good man may resemble a bad man, in being supported by the power and wealth of others, as he here says that the Church of Scotland resembles Antichrist; and yet we cannot infer from this, that he is an unworthy character. Nay, we are told in this same book, chap. xxi. 24, that when the purest state of the church on earth shall come, "the kings of the earth," who are said, in the description of Antichrist which he quotes, to give its power and strength to the beast, "shall bring their glory and honour in-  
"to the church." But since the Doctor considers it as one part of the similarity of our church to Antichrist, that her ministers, while as responsible for their doctrine and practice as those of any Dissenters, are secured, as long as they discharge their duty, in their maintenance by Government, what will he say of the millennial church, into which the kings of the earth are to bring their glory and honour, to support and promote it? Since he represents it likewise as an evidence of our similarity to the mother of harlots, that we have a *written confession*, exhibiting our view of the meaning of the scriptures, and that our creed will not agree with his view of these scriptures, does it not follow from this, that as there is not at present a church in Scotland with which he can join in communion, every Baptist, and Independent, and Presbyterian dissenting, as well as *established* congregation, must so far be viewed by him as a member of Antichrist? In fine, as he mentions it as another point of resemblance, that the two witnesses of God prophesy in her clothed in sackcloth, it appears necessarily to result from it, that as we are informed in Rev. xi. 3. that these witnesses were to prophesy for 1260 prophetic days, or according to him for that number of years, the Church of Scotland, if we attend to the first period of its existence as a distinct society, must, in the Doctor's view, have still a prospect of existence for an extent of time, not very encouraging to him and his Independent brethren in their attempts to overthrow it.

these gentlemen in a great measure is founded, in the Missionary Magazine for March 1804\*.

You have, however, produced evidence which appears to you at least, demonstrative of the truth of your charges, and which consequently justifies your separation from the established church. Of this evidence you invite a fair discussion. It will not therefore, I presume, be disagreeable to you to attend to some reflections which, on a perusal of your Letters, occurred to a member of the Establishment, and which, on review, still dispose him to object to the cogency of your reasoning, for the necessity or propriety of the step which you have taken. The arguments which you adduce to establish your position are of two kinds; those which, in your opinion, prove *the constitution* of the Church of Scotland to be anti-scriptural, and those which relate to the improprieties exhibited in *its administration*. In the following pages it is proposed to consider these arguments in their order, with the degree of force which they appear to possess.

Conscious of the fallacy of the common practice of arguing against a scheme from the *abuse* which may have been made of it, or the errors and inconsistencies which may have appeared in the conduct of those who have held it, you justly express, in language the most pointed, your disapprobation of such reasoning. "It is not," you say, (p. 9.), "the character of individuals, but the general aspect and tendency of any particular system, by which our opinion of it ought to be regulated. If it be founded on scriptural principles, *ungodly men* being *professedly* attached to it will not make it worse; and if not, the most eminent examples of holiness among its votaries will not be able to sanction it." And again, in p. 105. "Let it be recollected, it is *systems*, not the characters either of individuals or of particular societies, the merits of which we are here canvassing. These are only implicated so far as they are found countenancing a system, of which there is satisfactory evidence that it is not agreeable to the word of

\* It may however be remarked, that since it is specified in this passage as a sign of Antichrist, even according to Mr. Ewing, that she allows none to live among men who do not receive her mark or number, it is impossible for him, without directly *opposing his own expressions*, as well as the explicit testimony of the sacred oracles, to apply this opprobrious appellation to our church, which permits Independents to live unmolested in their religious privileges.

"God." Than this, indeed, nothing can be more rational; for, were we to reject a principle or system on account of the errors, and even immoralities, of many who hold it, we should not only set aside Presbytery, but Independency and Christianity, and even reason itself. You rightly, therefore, begin with the constitution of our church, and on this ground we are willing most readily to meet you, assured that if it can be proved to be agreeable to scripture, it will be difficult for you to establish the propriety of separating from its communion.

In reviewing then your remarks upon *the constitution* of the Church of Scotland, I am happy to observe that you are pleased to object only to its form of government, conscious, I presume, that the views which it professes of evangelical truth, in its Confession and Catechisms, are no less consistent than your own with the word of God. Its administration by Presbytery alone is the object of your censure, and against this you declaim as one abundant source of the evils which are to be found in it. With this momentous consequence however, even though these evils should exist, I hope it will afterwards appear that Presbytery is not chargeable; and that of all those forms of government which we know, Presbytery is the best fitted to preserve purity of doctrine and discipline. At present it is sufficient to mention, that corruptions, not only in government but in sentiment, are not peculiar to Presbytery, but are to be found in an equal, if not in a greater degree, among Independents themselves. Nowhere have the opinions of Socinians, and Arians, and Arminians, and Universalists, more generally prevailed than among the Independents in England\*. As no argument then, founded upon the existence of such evils among Independents, would be admitted by you to be conclusive against Independency, unless it could be proved that it was favourable *to the introduction* of them; so no argument, I contend, can be adduced from such evils, if they exist in the Establishment, against its Presbyterian government, unless it can be evinced that that mode of government is the source and

\* That many, also, of the Presbyterians in England have embraced these errors cannot be denied. It is well known, however, that these Presbyterians have no courts of review, or do not regard them; and that, while they profess to be Presbyterians, from their total inattention to the peculiarities of that system, they are more worthy, in a certain view, of the name of Independents.



cause of the *introduction* of such errors. But this you have never even attempted to demonstrate.

I am surprised, besides, that in your examination of Presbytery, you did not consider its various parts separately, as detailed in our standards, with the particular evidence which is exhibited for each. The great body of that evidence you have very slightly noticed, and part of it you have not even noticed at all. This, however, would undoubtedly have been the most satisfactory method of refuting the errors, if errors they are, which are maintained on this subject by our national church, and it would certainly have impressed your readers with a more favourable idea of your fidelity and candour. It would also, perhaps, by no means have been prejudicial to you in this important particular, if, after stating your arguments in favour of Independency, you had been pleased likewise to mention what had been said in answer to them a hundred times by former Presbyterians. But this you have thought proper completely to suppress; and instead of putting your readers, agreeably to your promise (p. 3), in possession of the arguments on both sides of the question, while you have illustrated, at least as fully as you knew them, the arguments of Independents, have totally concealed the replies of their opponents.

You have thought proper to consider *at once*, and in a very few pages, the *different* peculiarities of the Presbyterian system; and some parts of that system you have not even mentioned. As this plan, however, neither appears to be a faithful exhibition of truth, nor fitted for clear and accurate discussion, it is proposed in what follows, to consider,

In the 1st place, The opinions of Presbyterians and Independents with regard to the nature and extent of that power which should be granted to church-rulers.

2dly, To whom this power is given by the scriptures in a particular congregation; whether to the members of the church at large—to the pastor alone—or to the pastor and lay-elders united.

And in the 3d place, If every particular congregation is so to be governed, whether its pastor and elders are, by scripture-authority, required to submit to the review and controul of the pastors and elders of several congregations, united in a Presbytery, Synod, or Assembly.

I am, Sir, &c.

## LETTER II.

SIR,

THE *first* point, I apprehend, in which you differ from Presbyterians, is the *nature* of that power which they grant to their rulers; and here, in words at least, the difference is important. Upon this topic Independents have often declaimed with the utmost keenness, and from this source they have derived their warmest invectives against the Establishment. Upon this topic, too, you considerably enlarge, and attempt to paint, in very shocking colours, the baneful consequences with which the authority of Presbytery is necessarily attended.

Before however I attend to your arguments, I would briefly advert to a misrepresentation which has frequently been made by Independents, of the claims of Presbyterians with regard to the *nature and kind* of their authority. Often has it been said, that the power for which they contend, amounts to nothing less than a *legislative* authority, and invests them with a right to enact at pleasure whatever laws they wish to establish in the church of Christ\*. Than this, however, nothing undoubtedly can be more remote from their sentiments. They, as well as Independents, profess to admit that Jesus is the only Head of his church; that those laws alone which *he* has revealed, bind the consciences and conduct of his subjects†; and that the highest honour to

\* See Watt's Plain Proof, p. 175, near the middle, where he affirms that a *legislative* power is assumed by Presbyterians.

† In proof of this, we may refer to the words of our Confession, chap. xxi. sect. iii. where it is expressly declared, "that it belongeth to Synods and Councils *ministerially*," *i. e.* merely as the servants of Jesus, and accountable to him, "to determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience"—to the words of that very Assembly which framed this Confession, and collected from the scriptures our form of church-government; "We say again, that this power of ministers is no where any other than *ministerial*, and that it is not to be exercised any where at their *own* wills, but according to *his direction*," (p. 9. of their Answers to the Seven Independents)—to the words of the London ministers, who, while they contend most strenuously for the divine right of Presbytery, declare explicitly, p. 45), that the power which is to be committed to its rulers is to be "only subordinate and ministerial;" and to the treatises of Gillespie, in his Aaron's Rod Blossoming, p. 175; of Wood against Lockier, p. 276, &c.; and of Hall &c

which ecclesiastical rulers can now aspire, is to explain what the doctrine of the church is, with regard to the true meaning of the laws of Christ, and authoritatively to enforce among those of her communion the execution of *his* laws. In matters indeed of *inferior* moment, which regard simply the convenience, or external order and regularity of the church, and for which no explicit directions are given in the scriptures, Presbyterians allow that Christ has intrusted a power with those who rule in his church, to appoint such regulations as may be requisite for the general ends of edification and utility. But this is no more than Independents themselves have uniformly claimed\*; while it is an incontestible fact, that, in every instance in which *legislative* power is disclaimed by Independents, it is *universally* and *explicitly* disclaimed by Presbyterians.

But admitting that the power with which rulers are invested is not legislative, but simply of the kind which has been now stated, what is the *degree* of it which they are warranted to exercise? Are they entitled, as Independents affirm, merely to deliver their decisions to those whom they govern, as *matters of opinion*? or have they a right to announce them, as Presbyterians maintain, as *authoritative de-*

Church-government, p. 59; with many other Presbyterians, who, though they assert most decidedly the right of the rulers to ecclesiastical power, very pointedly state that it is not to be legislative. Above all, we may refer to that very striking fact in favour of Presbytery, that many of the most zealous of our ancient Presbyterians, in the last awful persecutions which were witnessed in these lands, bled and died in support of this truth, that *Christ alone* is invested with a *legislative* power in his church. How strange then, whatever may be the *practices* of Presbyterians, that Independents should deny this to be at least a part of *their principles*, as much as of their own, that the power of church-officers is only to be subordinate, not legislative! And how extraordinary, that the writer before quoted, when speaking solely of the Presbyterian system, should boldly affirm, in the face of such testimonies, that it authorizes its church-officers to *make*, as well as *interpret* and execute its laws! If such be the view of *the principles* of Presbyterians which is so obnoxious to Independents, it is no less rejected, in profession and system, by Presbyterians than by them. And, at the same time, it is a view of *the principles* of Presbytery which I feel obliged to declare that I have never found in the writings of Presbyterians, and have met with only amidst the self-created theories and accusations of Independents.

\* Thus the tabernacle-churches in Scotland require their members to stand in singing.



*terminations*, and require their cheerful and universal obedience? In the former of these schemes you profess your belief, and reprobate the latter, as subservient merely to promote the purposes of tyranny and oppression. That instances of tyranny may indeed be found in the conduct of Presbyterians, I readily grant; but that such instances are authorized by their system, I positively deny. Nothing can be more contrary to the *genius* at least of this form of government; while it is a notorious fact, that it is not only not excluded by Independency itself, but seems not even to be *equally* precluded by this plan of administration. Many instances might be adduced, of most imperious decisions by Independent rulers; decisions, too, which, when once passed, were for ever final; and decisions pronounced by the very men who, while they exclaim against Presbyterians for exercising even inferior authoritative power, profess to claim no more than a right to deliver their *opinion* and *advice* to those whom they govern. Even in one of your sister-churches, an instance of this kind the most astonishing and unaccountable, if we are to believe the narrative of those who were aggrieved, has already occurred; and their narrative has never yet been invalidated. In this case, surely, it was more than an *advice* or *opinion* which was delivered: for when certain members refused to concur with the pastor in a most insignificant matter, so far at least as it related to him, a decision of censure was passed, not only in a tone as authoritative as is ever assumed by any Presbytery, but in a manner as summary and rigorous as that of any Roman Conclave\*. In Independency, moreover, which, in its number

\* See a narrative published by seven members of your church at Perth, who were excommunicated by Mr. Little, for refusing to concur with the rest of the members in adopting the version of the Psalms of David composed by Dr. Watts. The account which is here given of the conduct of that gentleman, considering him as an Independent, is indeed astonishing, and though attempted to be set aside by him in the reply which he has published, seems yet to be unanswered. He contents himself, *in general* (p. 7), with "denying the view which they give of his words and actions, in relation to their separation." And though they have produced charges against him the most *precise* and *specific*, and established them by facts the most pointed and particular, he satisfies himself, and imagines that he will satisfy the world, by *simply saying*, "that theirs is a most distorted and unjust representation, designed to bring the whole tabernacle-discipline to contempt." It must be obvious however, that such *vague* affirmations, unsubstantiated by

of rulers, resembles and equals the lowest form of *political democracy*, there is certainly more room, *as in other democracies*, for the display of tyranny than in a mixed and

proof, cannot be sustained as a satisfactory answer to accusations so serious, and attempted at least to be supported by references to facts and incidents the most *precise* and *determinate*. His reasons, moreover, for declining "to enter into particulars, and for long "silence" after the publication of their narrative (compare p. 12 with p. 6, 7.) must strike every candid and impartial mind as very *extraordinary*, when urged by a man as an excuse for not vindicating himself from accusations certainly the most *particular* and *important*. He tells us, that "it can answer no other possible end "than to harden the minds, and to increase the prejudices, of the "public against the truth—that if he were to follow them over "the ground they have trodden, it would be to fall into the same "evil he condemns—and besides, however it may be with others, "he feels it impossible to *repeat* and *refute* their slanders without being in a measure contaminated with their spirit; and rather than "this, he would endure their utmost reproach.—That, from careful examination of his mind, in short, he is persuaded that it "would be more injurious to his character as a Christian minister, "to enter into such a contest, than all their invectives can prove—"and that these are the reasons why, in *the kind* of defence which "he is pleased to publish, he addresses himself *only to those* who "are under his *pastoral care*." But, certainly, if this reasoning were conclusive, it would follow that whenever the conduct of a Christian, or of a minister was attacked, if the charges appeared to him unjust and exaggerated, he ought by no means to endeavour to refute and remove them. It is merely his duty to assert the contrary, and content himself with supposing that this *assertion*, though unsupported by proof, will be completely satisfactory to the world at large, who know no more of him than of those who are his accusers. Nay, it is a necessary consequence from his mode of arguing, that it is impossible for a Christian when assailed by slanders, to reply to it with *meekness*; and, like his blessed Lord when reviled by his enemies, while he vindicates himself from their revilings, not to *revile them again*. But is not this contrary at once to the commandments of scripture, and the example of Jesus, who repeatedly repelled the slanders of his foes? Is it not at variance, also, with the conduct of Paul, who, in his different Epistles, frequently defends himself from the imputations which were cast upon himself and his ministry by the Judaizing teachers? And does it not imply a censure of your brother Mr. Ewing, who repeatedly attempted, though not with *superabundant meekness*, to reply to Mr. Robertson, respecting the interesting charges which he advances against him; as well as to your friend Mr. Haldane, who thought proper to follow a similar course, when animadversions were made upon his opinions and plan by a great literary character? In short, as the honour and interests of religion must undoubtedly be affected in a very eminent degree by the accusations which are here ad-

moderated government, such as that of Presbytery. In the latter, the administration is vested in a few, composed of ministers and lay-elders; the last of whom ought, at least

vanced against Mr. Little, if not individually refuted, and as it is impossible for him, as in the case of a *mere general* allegation, to vindicate himself from these *particular* charges by his future conduct, he appears to be bound, by every consideration, to answer precisely the accusations here exhibited, and thus to wipe away from himself and his congregation the odium which appears to be thrown upon them.

If Mr. Little, besides, as he here tells us, intends only to address himself to those who are under his pastoral care, and to vindicate himself and his conduct *solely to them*, why has he published this address to *the world*? Is the world to believe them any more than their pastor, because, as he was for a long time, they have yet been silent. Did not they too, by confirming the sentence of excommunication, make themselves a party with him? and would it be fair to give credit to their *vague* assertions against another party any more than his, if they do not answer the proofs by which their opponents support their charges?

In fine, admitting even that the cause for which these persons were excommunicated was *just* and *valid*, one thing seems to be plain, that though the church afterwards sanctioned this deed, Mr. Little himself, after public worship, without convening the members and obtaining their consent, ventured to pronounce upon these individuals this awful sentence. Nay, when the church assembled to decide upon the step which he had taken, he would not allow the men, whom he alone as yet could be considered as having excommunicated, to speak in their own defence, before they were excommunicated by the church also. And afterwards, when two of the members who were expelled, waited upon him for a copy of the sentence of excommunication, he told them that he had burnt it, and would not write another; and that if they wanted such a paper, they might recover it from the flames. And, as if these insults had not sufficed, when they requested him to produce a letter which they had written to Mr. Haldane, narrating their grievances, and which had been transmitted by him to Mr. Little, and when they asked him expressly to point out any passages of it in which they had mis-stated the truth, he positively refused. Is such conduct, however, consistent with the principles of modern Independents, who boast so much of the *liberty* and *equity* which are discovered in their courts, and exclaim with such keenness against the tyranny of our Establishment? Can their pastor, without requesting a meeting of the church, and obtaining their consent, excommunicate any of their members? Are the persons who are accused of any crimes or errors, which *even merit excommunication*, denied in their churches, before sentence is pronounced, the privilege of *speaking* in their own vindication? Does it resemble the conduct of a man who was conscious that he had acted consistently with justice or candour, immediately to burn the paper which he had read

by the constitution of the church, to be chosen from the wisest and most pious among the people, and should be known to be zealously attached to their interests. Among Independents, however, representatives are excluded (a thing

in impeachment of the character of any of his members, and inflicting upon them one of the most awful of punishments? Was it worthy of such a consciousness of rectitude and moderation, to refuse to furnish them with another copy of the deed, and to bid them, if they chose, recal it from the flames? Could conduct so tyrannical and imperious as this, however merited the sentence, be tolerated in any civil courts in Europe, except those of the military despot of France? Did it intimate that he was able satisfactorily to overturn the representation which they had given in their letter to Mr. Haldane, when he refused to read it, and point out any instance in which their statement was incorrect? Are accusations like these, which so deeply concern *the honour of religion*, and *the respectability of his church*, to be set aside, by simply telling us, that he would prejudice the wicked against the truth, and would imbibed the spirit with which slanders are uttered, were he to reply particularly to these allegations? Such an apology may, perhaps, appear sufficient to Mr. Little and his Independent friends, but it will not satisfy the world at large, judging by the principles of equity and integrity. And till these charges are individually, not merely *denied*, but *refuted*, *the credit of religion*, so far as connected with *the honour of Independents* who associate with him, and *the discipline of the church* which retains him as its pastor, must be considered as deeply and materially affected.

Nor is the case of Mr. Little the only instance of oppressive government which occurs among Independents. Even in a tabernacle-church which was formed lately at Elgin, under the ministry of Mr. Ballantine, and the greater part of which separated from him, something very similar to spiritual domination appears to have been practised. Their pastor, while he professed to grant to each member an equal right to judge with himself, was the only person, it seems in their apprehension, who governed their church. Against this conduct they remonstrate in the memorial which they sent to him; and observe, "As to the government of the congregation we shall not stickle for any name, though we do not love the unscriptural phrase *Independency*. And as to the expression *Presbyterian*, from the word *presbyter*, we know it is scriptural, for it occurs times almost unnumbered in the Bible, as any one may see that has a Concordance, by looking at the word *elder*, *elders*, which is the English translation for the word *presbyter*, *presbyters*. But we will not strive about words. Our determination is, however, that we will not be governed by a *single* person, for that is neither *Presbytery* nor *Independency*, old nor new, but is a mere arbitrary government, like *Papery* or *Episcopacy on a small scale*; and this is a condition that we cannot depart from, as it is contrary to our original contract when we came together as minister and people."

which is admitted in the lowest *republican* forms of government), and a plan of ecclesiastical administration is followed, which, in its form at least, is much more lawless, and more fitted to be productive either of tyranny or of anarchy ; as it constitutes every member of the church, man, woman, or child, for such sometimes, from early piety, are received to that privilege, a ruler in the church. In Presbytery, if a person feels himself aggrieved by the decision of a Session, he may appeal to a Presbytery, from that to a Synod, and from that to a General Assembly, the superior court being in every instance a check upon the inferior, having power to reverse its acts and deeds. In Independency however, the

“ If our minister,” say they again, “ chooses to take *the deacons* as a *session* or ecclesiastical council, to rule along with himself, we are pleased. If this does not suit him, we agree that seven, nine, or a greater number of men be chosen by mutual consent of minister and congregation, and as many of the present deacons among them as can be agreed upon, and let these act as *representatives* of the church or congregation.” After which they tell him again, that they will not be governed by him alone. See p. 51 and 52 of Ballantine’s Observations. Whether this representation was true in the extent which they so frequently and strongly affirm, I do not pretend to say. At any rate it is certain, as Mr. Ballantine acknowledges (p. 95), that their charges were just in a particular instance, for without consulting deacons, or members, or a single individual, so far as is specified, he expelled a member from the communion of his church.

To these examples of tyranny among Independent rulers, were it considered as necessary, many others might be added, to prove that the people, however flattered by them with the appearance of power, and with the solicitation of their request before any decision is made, have frequently only the shew. Of these I shall at present only mention one. Two respectable ministers lately, while travelling through England, happened to be present in an Independent church, where also there were another stranger minister and gentleman. After the services connected with preaching were finished, the pastor proceeded to dispense the sacrament, and having consecrated the elements, announced to the congregation, as if to ask their consent, that this stranger clergyman and gentleman proposed that day to eat with them the supper. Upon uttering however these words, without waiting a moment for the consent of the members, he turned to the strangers, and, after participating himself, delivered to them the bread and cup. Was not this however, and the fact can be established by incontestable evidence, a mere tantalizing of the members of this congregation? Was it not a pretending to consult them about the communication of a most solemn and important privilege, while yet it was plainly and avowedly declared that their opinion was not to be regarded at all?



decision of the first court is completely final, and the injured can appeal to no other superior tribunal upon earth. Whatever then may be the *conduct* of Presbyterians and Independents, supposing the rulers, upon each of these plans, to be equally faithful and equally conscientious (and, to give justice to the argument, this must be supposed), I contend that the *Presbyterian form* of government is better fitted than that of Independency, to prevent tyranny, and secure impartial equity to the people.

“The distinguishing feature of Presbytery,” you say (p. 28), “is the system of representation.” The minister and elders of a particular congregation govern that congregation; the ministers and elders of a number of congregations, called a Presbytery, judge of cases which come before them by appeal against the sentence of any particular Session; and the ministers and elders of a number of Presbyteries, denominated a Synod, decide upon those references which are made to them against the determination of any particular Presbytery; as an Assembly, again, does upon that of any particular Synod, as well as deliberates about matters of general importance. “In an Independent church however,” you remark (p. 30), “nothing is decided by representation. Whatever is done by those who are appointed to rule, is carried on in the presence of the general body, and with their consent. While an Independent church thus assumes the sole government of its own affairs, it is amenable to no society of men under heaven. In reference to its own members, its decision is final, and it pretends to interfere with none else. It will be recollected (p. 47), that this peculiarity of Presbytery consists in the authority of the representatives of a church of Christ, as distinguished from the personal conviction of the individual members of it. Now we have no hesitation in asserting, that this distinguishing feature of Presbytery is directly opposed to the general spirit, as well as some of the express precepts of the word of God. Every one will allow that Christianity is a spiritual religion; and it seems a necessary principle in such a religion, that every one be convinced in his own mind. The conscience of the individual here has a most extensive sphere of influence. Its approbation is essentially necessary to the existence of any act of acceptable worship. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. The moment that compulsion is introduced,

“ spiritual worship is destroyed. This general position, I  
 “ believe, few will dispute ; but mark how it affects the  
 “ case in question. What is the meaning of the *authority*  
 “ vested in a Presbytery, of that power by which they can  
 “ command any one under their jurisdiction to act according  
 “ to their will ? Does not the very existence of this au-  
 “ thority imply the necessity of it ? Does it not prove that  
 “ advice is not sufficient ; that the conscience of the indivi-  
 “ dual is not convinced ; that something more powerful than  
 “ persuasion must be resorted to ? There could be no room  
 “ for authority, if conviction were deemed necessary, because  
 “ it is only by instruction and persuasion that it is produ-  
 “ ced. Like the sensitive plant, it shrinks at the gentlest  
 “ touch of power, and the rude intruder must be complete-  
 “ ly withdrawn before it again exert its energy. On these  
 “ principles, I consider the authority of Presbytery as stand-  
 “ ing on a most unscriptural basis.”

Here, Sir, before I advert to your different remarks, I  
 would notice a very striking and palpable inconsistency be-  
 tween your view of the government and discipline of your  
 churches, and that which is delivered by another minister  
 in your connection, no less distinguished for his present zeal  
 against our Presbyterian Establishment, than for the extent  
 and accuracy of the knowledge of your ecclesiastical con-  
 stitution which, in the opinion of his followers, he possesses.  
 “ *Whatever,*” you affirm, “ is done by those who rule in your  
 “ congregations, is carried on *in the presence* of the general  
 “ body, and with their *consent.*” “ It seems by no means  
 “ agreeable to the directions given to the primitive churches,”  
 says that gentleman however, in his lecture upon Acts xv.  
 (p. 34, 35), “ that *every measure*, however trifling or ob-  
 “ vious, should be brought *before the church* for general dis-  
 “ cussion, or for obtaining a public declaration *of the opini-*  
 “ *on of each member* before the office-bearers presume to  
 “ put it in practice. From these, it is plain that the office-  
 “ bearers are to feed the flock ; that is, to govern them by  
 “ instruction and persuasion according to the word of God.  
 “ In doing this, they are entitled, nay, bound to carry into  
 “ effect the rules of scripture, and *to require obedience from*  
 “ *the church to those rules when laid before them.* A differ-  
 “ ent conduct deprives the church of the benefit of govern-  
 “ ment, must give continual encouragement to dissension,

“and is likely to make discipline degenerate into an engine of faction.

“Nothing again,” adds he (p. 35), “is less likely to serve the cause of truth, or even the cause of Christian liberty, than making every thing that ought to be done, wait for discussion in full assembly. If the church contains the collective wisdom, it contains also the collective ignorance of the brethren : if it combines their gifts and their graces, it combines also their infirmities and corruption. Where every thing must undergo discussion, some may be in danger of thinking they have laws to make, instead of laws to obey. A few of the most active spirit and readiest elocution will become the real movers and managers in every business ; and a part will thus be put for the whole. When they are agreed, every thing must be complied with : when they are at variance, every thing must be objected to. *No tyranny is so bad as that of a cabal* : that is, of those who are uppermost for the moment in the fermentation of anarchy. Debate, when indulged, is favourable to the introduction of this sort of tyranny. It heats the passions, warps the judgment ; hurries men to measures of violence and precipitation ; engages them to the side which they happen to have taken ; inclines them to contention, and tedious consultation, about matters of the most trivial importance ; and makes them be ever on the watch to satisfy a restless disposition, by seizing an opportunity to interfere. In short, *those who most need restraint*, are, by such means, in danger of being led to set it at defiance ; while the peaceful, and those to whom *the government is committed nominally*, are terrified and chained down by the turbulence of *the rest*.”

Here I am certain that you cannot fail to perceive the very satisfactory refutation of your sentiments in particular, and of those of Independents in general, with regard to the degree of ecclesiastical power which should be granted to rulers, that is contained in these words, even of a fellow-labourer in your vineyard. In them it is affirmed in the plainest terms, that *every measure* ought not to be discussed in the presence of church-members, and their opinion and concurrence asked before a decision is made, because, if this were done, the church would be *deprived of the benefit of government*, continual encouragement would be given to dissension, and discipline would degenerate into an engine of



faction. In them, also, it is maintained in terms no less explicit, that the governors are entitled, nay, *bound*, to carry into effect the rules of scripture, and to require *obedience* from the church to those rules *when laid before them*; i. e. (as is evident from the connection) without previously consulting them. And the reasons which are assigned for allowing the rulers to determine in *inferior* matters, without the advice of the brethren, are much more conclusive for their authoritative decision in those which are more important, without their assistance. If less *interesting* points, and points which are *obvious*, are not to wait for discussion in full assembly, because, if the church contain the collective wisdom, it contains also the collective ignorance of the brethren; and if it combines their gifts and their graces, it combines also their infirmities and corruption; much more must it be the duty of the rulers of the church themselves, to decide authoritatively on more momentous matters, and matters which are confessedly more difficult and doubtful\*. As

\* Not only is it manifest from the argument of Mr. Ewing which is here stated, that it is the office bearers alone, even upon his *own principles*, who are to judge in important as well as trivial matters without consulting the members; but whatever *he intended*, the same thing seems to be evident from his other arguments. It is the former alone, he says, who are to decide upon points which are trifling and obvious, because, as he before affirms, "it is the office-bearers alone who are authorized in scripture *to feed* the flock," or, as he "explains it, "to govern them by instruction and persuasion according to the word of God." But when the office-bearers are required in the sacred volume *to feed*, or, as he interprets it, *to govern* the flock, if it entitle them to determine in *inferior* matters, and matters which are *obvious*, without consulting them, is it not equally plain from it, that they must be much more authorised by it to exercise this power in more difficult points? And if the office-bearers only, in his opinion, should judge in these less interesting cases, because, as he also asserts, according to the passages which he quotes, "they are entitled, nay, bound by the word of God, in governing the church, *to carry into effect* the rules of scripture, and to require *obedience* from the church to those rules *when laid before them*;" the very same expressions, when employed in scripture respecting *their power in general*, with the obedience of the members, seem as clearly to intimate, that, in *every* point, the elders are to judge without soliciting the opinion and consent of the members. Are the *rules of scripture*, which he admits, from these passages, that they are to carry into effect, only *trifles*? or do they not comprehend *every thing* the most difficult and important, which can be the

I am persuaded, then, that you will not consider this gentleman as blindly attached to the cause of Presbytery, or in

subject of determination in an ecclesiastical court? If then, as he contends, the office-bearers of the church are warranted, by the passages which he produces in the margin, to carry into effect *the laws of Christ* without consulting the opinion of the members, and to require obedience from the members to them, when laid before them; and if these laws, as is evident, include not only what is trivial and obvious, but what is *important* and *essential*; is it not incontestable, even from the arguments of *this gentleman*, who professes to be an *Independent*, that the office-bearers alone, as Presbyterians maintain, are to determine in matters which are *important* and *essential*, as well as those which are *obvious* and *trivial*?

In short, if it is only in things which are obvious and trivial that the office-bearers alone, in the opinion of Mr. Ewing, are authorized to judge without consulting the members, *who are the persons* that are to determine whether the matters which are to be the subject of judgment upon any particular occasion, are trivial and obvious, or interesting and doubtful? It cannot be the people, for that would make the men *over whom* this extraordinary power *was to be exercised*, the judges of the extent to which it was to be employed, which is considered as impolitic in all proper governments; and it cannot be the office-bearers, for that would be to make the men who are to *exercise* this power, judges of the extent in which they were to exert it, which has always been considered as no less preposterous. Unless then he can point out a satisfactory standard, *separate from the opinion of the office-bearers and the people*, by which it can be ascertained what things are trivial and obvious, and what are difficult and important, the commission of such power as that for which he pleads, to the elders of the church, at least upon the principles of *Independent* societies, whatever they may think of it, seems in the highest degree to be dangerous. Their office-bearers, it appears, according to this gentleman, are themselves to judge in things trivial and obvious, without granting the members a single word or vote; and, at the same time, so far as can be discovered, it is *the office-bearers alone* who are to say *when* they are to exercise this extraordinary power, and erect themselves into the only judges in the society. If this be consistent with your notions of liberty, or the first principles of independency, I should be happy to see upon what grounds it can be established?

If the office-bearers, in fine are to judge in *less interesting* matters only, and are to take the judgment of the people in *more important* affairs, does not this intimate, that though they are fit for determining what are considered as *trifles*, they are not equal to the determination of things which are *intricate* and *interesting*, and need the *superior or combined information of the members*? And that though it would be dangerous, from the collected ignorance of the latter, as Mr. Ewing affirms, to allow them to judge in things obvious and trivial, it is *perfectly safe* to permit them to judge in things *dubious* and *important*?

the least disposed to promote its interests, I beg you will attend to the tendency of his reasoning, and, after *adjusting the differences* among yourselves, honestly declare, whether it does not at once *flatly contradict* and completely overthrow your favourite position, That ecclesiastical rulers are not authorized authoritatively to decide upon *any* point which falls under their cognizance, without previously requesting the presence and counsel of the members of the church!

I would observe, moreover, that you yourself have admitted a case (and it has frequently occurred) in which, even in an Independent church, authoritative power must be exercised by your rulers. "Suppose," you say (p. 50), "a case of discipline to occur in an Independent church, in which a difference of opinion obtained, how far a charge was distinctly proved. The church must act in one way or another. If the party be excluded against whom the charge is brought, those who think him not guilty, will take offence at the measure. If, on the other hand, he be continued in communion without reproof, those who think him guilty, will be equally offended." A decision notwithstanding must necessarily be made, and the minority you admit must either submit to the majority, or withdraw from their communion. Now, in this instance, I would ask you, if an authoritative power be not used by *the majority* of this Independent church, without regard to the will of the minority, as much as by any class of Presbyterian rulers? and if they do not act as decidedly, without any regard to the convictions of their brethren? Besides, I would inquire, whether this must not be the case in Independent, as well as Presbyterian churches, *in every instance* (and they cannot be few) in which a question is carried and acted upon by a *majority* against a minority? Is not *the opinion* of the latter uniformly disregarded? Is not the will of the former executed *as a law*? Can *any* religious society exist without it? Does not this unquestionably involve of *necessity*, as much authority as the decision of any Presbyterian court? And is not the minority obliged as readily to submit to this authoritative determination, if it be an inferior point—or if it be a fundamental article, as universally to separate from their former brethren, if they are so disposed, as in Presbyterian churches?

When a majority, in a word, of any of your churches determines against a minority, that a brother who has happened to offend before all, should be *rebuked* before all, that he may be taught by it to be ashamed, I should be glad to know, if it is only a *simple advice* which is delivered? And when such a majority decides against a minority, that a brother is to be *excommunicated*, and their decision is fulfilled, I should be happy to be informed, if it is only a *simple opinion* which is stated? This, I believe, you will hardly maintain: and consequently, since in these and all other instances, where the will of a majority is carried and acted upon against a minority, from the very nature of things, authority is exercised, I hold it to be unfair and contradictory in Independents to declaim against Presbyterians, when they claim for *their rulers*, the *same portion* of authority which is necessarily assumed by the majority of *the members* in each of their congregations; and without which, whatever *persuasion* might be employed, and whatever *advice*s might be delivered, not one of their societies can be conceived to exist.

You affirm, however, that to exercise authority without the presence and consent of the members of the church is inconsistent with the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, one of the laws of which is, that before a person can perform any acceptable act of worship, he must have, in some measure, a conviction of its fitness and propriety. And you contend, that since a man must first be convinced by persuasion, before he can render any such obedience, authority is unnecessary, for if authority is used as well as persuasion, it seems to imply that the latter is insufficient. But in answer to this I would observe, that though authority is claimed by Presbyterian rulers over their members, it is not an *unreasonable* nor *imperious* authority. They consider themselves as the *servants* of the Lord Jesus: the subjection which they demand from the members of their churches, is not to themselves, or to their *will*, as you insinuate (p. 47), but to what they consider as the will of their blessed Master; and the obedience which they require to their decisions in his name, is not, as you allege, blind and compulsory, but enlightened and voluntary. Nor do they barely deliver their commands, and enjoin *immediate* and *implicit* submission (as one would imagine from your representation); but while they declare authoritatively whatever appears to

them to be the mind of Christ, and command all cordially to obey it, they, no less than Independents, are careful to state the grounds upon which their decision rests, and to afford to their members every mean by which their consciences may be satisfied, and this enlightened and voluntary obedience produced. Their public deliberations in every instance, where it is fit, are open to the hearing and examination of their members; and there seems to be *nothing in Presbytery* to prevent every discussion which is proper to be carried on before an Independent, to be carried on also before a Presbyterian congregation. The reasons, besides, for every determination are not only uniformly stated, as has been already mentioned, but if any of their members either do not understand their meaning, or perceive their force, they are never denied an opportunity of obtaining satisfaction by private conversation, or correspondence with the rulers. If, in any case, in short, of inferior magnitude, they cannot acquiesce in the decision of these rulers, forbearance can be granted to them no less than among Independents; and if, in any case, it be necessary to separate, because it is of superior importance, and they cannot comply, they are not *compelled* to obey, but are allowed to separate no less than among them.

There is one point, however, and but *one*, in which Presbyterians appear to differ from Independents on the subject before us, and on this you seem to lay considerable stress; namely, that though the obedience which is required from their members by the former, is as free and as enlightened as that which is demanded from their members by the latter, Presbyterian rulers do not admit their people to judge and vote upon the propriety of their measures along with themselves, before they are finally adopted. But to this fact the words of Mr. Ewing, which I have quoted, furnish a complete and satisfactory answer. Nothing, undoubtedly, more directly tends to *subvert the order and government* of the church, as that gentleman affirms, than to allow every member a right to judge and vote upon the measures of rulers, and to oblige these rulers to retract or carry forward any of these measures, only in as far as it is agreeable to a majority of the people. It is, in fact, constituting those who should *be ruled*, the *rulers*, while the decisions of those who are dignified with that name are entirely subject to their determination. Their opinions, it is



evident, where this system is adopted, can only be passed into laws, when it pleases the majority of those who *are to obey them*; and when it does not please them, they are completely rejected. All the power, therefore, which is vested in the rulers, according to this plan, is merely nominal; and amounts simply to a right to state those measures which they have in contemplation to adopt, and to preside in the meeting during the deliberation of the members, while the right of judging, as to the propriety of these measures, is committed to the latter. As, therefore, it seems plain, that to grant to the members according to this system, a right to vote upon the proposals of the rulers, is utterly subversive of the power of these rulers, and reduces them to the situation of those who are *ruled*, while it gives the supreme authority to the *multitude*, the greater part of whom, according to Mr. Ewing, are unqualified for judging—as this system, I say, is attended with these consequences, it appears to be totally inadmissible, and that it is the province of the rulers, without the assistance of the members, to govern the affairs of the church of God.

If authority, moreover, as exercised by Presbyterians, as you evidently insinuate, is not consistent with liberty of conscience, I demand how it is consistent with it, when exercised by the *majority* of an *Independent* congregation over the *minority*? and if it be considered as *unnecessary*, as practised by Presbyterians, as you explicitly assert, because *advice* and *persuasion* appear to you sufficient for the government of the church, I ask how it is *requisite*, when assumed by such a *majority* over the *minority*, who must either submit, or renounce their communion? Cannot advice and persuasion among *them* too suffice? It is replied, as you have done, (p. 51), that the exercise of authority in such cases, among Independents, “is an unavoidable result of  
“social worship, and of the formation of Christian churches,  
“as long as imperfection of knowledge and of character remains?” I affirm, that since you allow that social worship and imperfection at once of knowledge and of character exist also among Presbyterians, among them too, even on your own principles, you must grant it to be necessary; while at the same time I contend, that for the reasons which have been mentioned, or may yet be mentioned, it should be committed to the rulers, and to the rulers alone, without admitting the members to be their advisers. I conceive it besides



to be a very evident truth, that whatever is delivered by *any* class of rulers, even though subordinate, whether sacred or civil, must be much more *regarded* when clothed with authority, than when communicated simply as an advice or admonition. It is true, that, till previously convinced of its propriety, in many cases, in civil, and always in sacred matters, no man can rightly perform any obedience to any government, whether civil or ecclesiastic. But what would we think of the man who should affirm, that because it is requisite to state to the people, very often in civil, and always in sacred matters, the reasons for which they are called to yield their obedience, it is *unnecessary* and *improper* for the rulers to clothe their communications to them, requiring this obedience, in the language of *authority*, and that they ought simply to enforce it by *advice* and *persuasion*? Would not such an assertion be rejected with contempt, as not only subversive of one of the strongest preservatives of public order and social peace, but as repugnant even to the common sense of mankind, which, by uniform practice, has constantly declared that *advice* is insufficient, and that the exercise of *authority*, in every government, is absolutely essential to secure the subordination and obedience of the subjects?

The authority, then, for which I argue, I wish it to be remembered, is not intended to *supersede* but to promote inquiry; is not designed to compel men, as you maintain, (p. 47), *without conviction* to believe and obey their ecclesiastical rulers, but to present to them more commanding incitements to examine, and more powerful though secondary enforcements and obligations, to obey the truth. For this purpose, it invests the governors of the church with a power, not merely to declare to her members what appears to be the mind and will of Christ, and to *advise* them to obey it, but with a power to inform them, that if, upon examination and reflection, they are not disposed to submit to it, they can no longer be entitled to the privileges of his people. The exercise of this power in every church, whether Independent or Presbyterian, either by the many or the few, I apprehend is essential to its very existence; for it requires but little observation to perceive that neither the purity nor the government of any society could long be preserved, where advices only were delivered to the members. And, in short, I must remark, that while Independents themselves, though they affect to reject it, grant to the majority, in each of their

congregations, the *very same* authority which Presbyterians claim for their ecclesiastical rulers, were they to lay aside this authority, and act simply by advice and persuasion, the most awful consequences must ensue from it to their churches. Ancient chaos, in a more fearful form, would once more resume her horrid reign; confusion and anarchy would universally prevail; and order and government, in their lawless societies, would be completely annihilated.

In fine, I would observe that the various terms also employed in scripture to express the power conferred upon church-rulers, seem plainly to intimate that they are entitled to govern those over whom they are placed, not merely by advice and persuasion, but by authoritative rule; and to govern them thus authoritatively, without previously consulting them as to their opinion and concurrence. As an examination of these terms will enable us the better to ascertain at once either the fallacy or the force of the preceding reasoning, let us proceed, though briefly, to consider a few of them; together with some others, descriptive of that obedience which is due from the members of a church to their rulers; and, with an examination of their import, conclude this letter.

In reviewing, then, the terms employed in scripture to denote the former, we see that it is compared to the power of a parent over his family; for says Paul (1 Tim. iii. 4, 5), "a bishop," or overseer, "must be one who rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" Now it is evidently here affirmed, that a power, corresponding in some measure to that which is possessed by a parent, or master over his family, is vested in the rulers of the Christian church, and that the latter must be exercised by them with judgment and prudence, if they are parents or masters, before they can be admitted to enjoy the former. But it is evident, that the power of a parent over his family is in the strictest sense authoritative, as well as persuasive; that while he should employ persuasion, he is invested also with authority, and can lawfully exercise it whenever it is requisite; and that it is the duty of his children to be subject to his commands, without waiting till their opinion be asked and adopted. Unless, then, the power which should be exercised also by church-rulers is authoritative, as well as per-

suasive, the reasoning of the Apostle, in the passage before us, would be totally inconclusive. It would be saying in effect, that before a man can be qualified for the exercise of a *lower* degree of power, a power of advice, he must have exercised aright a *much higher* degree of it, or a power of authority. As such a species of argumentation however is utterly unworthy of the inspired Apostle, we must certainly reject the interpretation which leads to it, and admit that the rulers of the Christian church, like the parent of a family and the master of a house, have a power not only of advice, but of authority.

Their power is represented likewise as resembling that of an *overseer*, who does not merely preside and advise, but authoritatively directs what he wishes to be done by those over whom he is appointed; for in Acts xx. 28, all the elders of the church of Ephesus, and they alone, in the sense there intended, are affirmed to have been made overseers of the flock, ἐπισκοποι\*. But if such an oversight as that which we have mentioned, in government as well as doctrine, be here asserted to be committed to the elders, and the elders exclusively, it seems naturally to follow, that, like all other *official* overseers, they must have an authoritative superintendence of those over whom they are placed, and a superintendence which entitles them to prescribe to church-members particular acts of service and obedience, without previously consulting their opinion and advice. This idea is strongly confirmed, by reflecting that this very word is used in a celebrated Greek translation of the Old Testament (Numb. xxxi. 14; and 2 Kings xi. 15), to denote the authoritative superintendence of *military officers*, the captains of hundreds, and the captains of thousands, over their men; a class of governors who were not accustomed merely to give *advice*s to their soldiers, or to request their *consent* before they delivered their orders.

Their power, besides, is described as similar to that of the *elders* who judged in the gates of the cities of Israel, for they are frequently in the New Testament distinguished by

\* Compare 1 Tim. iii; from which passage it is manifest, that it is an oversight, not as that of one Christian over another, but *official* and authoritative, and which is entirely peculiar to the *ministers* of the church, that is herè intended; for it is asserted in that place, that only those Christians who were already overseers in the former sense, and had the particular qualities there specified, were fitted for the *oversight there mentioned*.

their name. See 1 Tim. v. 17, &c. Now, since the name *elder* when applied to the judges of ancient Israel, and since the corresponding terms, senators and aldermen in modern times, uniformly denote authoritative officers, must not the very same name when given to the rulers of the Christian church, import in them too, a title to authority\*?

In short, not only are they distinguished by these names, but they are characterized by others, if possible, still more expressive of this authority. Thrice are they described in the very same chapter (Heb. xiii. 7. 17. 24), by the title of *rulers*, *ἡγεμονες*, which, though the weakest of the appellations bestowed upon them, and though it originally denotes merely guides or conductors, signifies *very frequently* in the Septuagint, and the best classic authors, civil rulers, and almost *uniformly* in the New Testament. *authoritative governors*. It is applied by Peter (1 Epistle ii. 14), to *subordinate governors*, to whom Christians are to submit, as well as to the king, who is supreme; by Matthew (chap. x. 18), to denote those *governors* and kings before whom they were to be brought for their adherence to the truth; by the celebrated Greek translators, in their version of Micah. iii. 9, to the *political heads* of the house of Jacob; in their version of Deut. i. 13, to the *civil rulers*, whom Moses appointed over the hundreds and thousands of the children of Israel; and in their version of Dan. iii. 2, to the *governors* of the various provinces of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar; by Xenophon, in his *Anabasis*, to the *general* or *commander* of the Grecian army; by Lucian, in his *Pseudomantis*, tom. i. p. 904, to the governor of Bithynia (*ὁ τότε ἡγούμενος Βιθυνίας*); by Josephus, in his *Antiquities*, book xviii. chap. iv. to Pontius Pilate, the *governor* of Judea; by Matthew, in his Gospel, chap. xxvii. no less than thrice, and by Luke, in his Gospel, chap. xx. once, to the same person; by the latter Evangelist (Acts vii. 10), to Joseph, when made *governor* by Pharaoh over Egypt, and all his house; and twice again, by the same historian (Acts

\* We know also, that the rulers of the Jewish synagogue were commonly distinguished by the name of *elders*. Hence, in Acts xiii. 15, and Mark v. 22, what is rendered in our version "the rulers of the synagogue," the old Syriac version translates by a word signifying *elders* or *seniores*. And hence, most probably, from a similarity of power between them and the rulers of the Christian church, the scripture has transferred to the latter their name.

xxiii. 24. 26), to Felix the *governor*. With the utmost propriety therefore does Beza, in his note upon the thirteenth chapter of the Hebrews, remark, that the application of this term to the governors of the church, not only imports that they are vested with authority, but “with *very great authority* ;” for, “it is,” adds he, “*verbum auctoritatis maximæ*,” a word expressive of *very great* authority. And, as if even this did not suffice, they are described by another title still stronger and more energetic, *πρωταρχοι* ; which is rendered in our Bibles (Rom. xii. 8, and 1 Tim. v. 17), “*rulers*,” and in 1 Thess. v. 12, “those who *are over* Christians in the Lord.” This term, we are assured by Stephens, in his Thesaurus, is very frequently given to political *governors* ; and is the very word employed in 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5, already quoted, to signify the authority of a parent over his family, or of a master over his house ; and in Titus iii. 8. 14, (compare Constantinus’s and Parkhurst’s Lexicons), to express the command which a Christian should endeavour to attain over himself, so as to excel in good works\*. And this very term, as will afterwards be proved, is very often used by Plato, and Xenophon, and Thucydides, and Herodotus, and Demosthenes, and Aristotle, for the *magistrates* of cities, and *governors* of countries. Since therefore these terms, which are so frequently employed in the best classic authors, and ancient versions and sacred oracles, to signify subordinate *rulers* and *governors*, are applied to the *elders* of the Christian church, and since *obedience* is required from the people to their elders at the very time when they are distinguished by these names, is it not plain that they must be possessed of a power not merely to *advise* and *direct*, but authoritatively to govern the church of Christ, whatever may be the degree and extent of that authority ? And if it be affirmed, that notwithstanding the application of these names to them, they are still to be viewed only as *guides* and *advisers*, upon the same principle may it not be asserted, that though they are given also to Joseph, Felix, and Pilate, and the different rulers of the provinces of Babylon, *they* ought to be considered as no more than advisers of the people ? and that when Pilate said concerning our Lord, “Take him and crucify him,” he did no more than give an advice ? But if

\* These are all the places, so far as is recollected, where it occurs in the New Testament.



such an inference, when applied to subordinate political governors, would most certainly be considered as completely ridiculous, must it not be equally ridiculous, when applied to subordinate ecclesiastical rulers, who are undeniably distinguished by the very same appellations?

And, upon the whole, the terms likewise, as we have already remarked, which are employed in scripture to denote the *obedience* of the people to their rulers, seem to intimate, that the latter are invested with a power not only of advice but authority. Not only is one word (*πειθεσθε*) used to express their obedience, (Heb. xiii. 17.) which signifies sometimes to yield to persuasion, and at other times to obey or submit to power and authority\*; but another word (*ὑπεικω*), which is not only rendered by Leigh, and Hedericus, and Parkhurst, and Beza, and the Vulgate, together with our translators, “*submit*,” but is frequently taken by the Greek writers, according to the testimony of one of our most learned lexicographers, “to signify *obedience* with *sub-missive respect*.” A third word is used (*ὑποτασσω*—See 1 Cor. xvi. 16), to express their obedience, if possible, still stronger, and which is very often employed to denote even the most entire and complete subjection which is men-

\* Thus, James.iii. 3, (and this is the least energetic of all the terms descriptive of their obedience), “We put bits in the horses’ mouths that they may *obey* us,” *προς το πειθεσθαι αυτοις ημιν*: thus, too, Titus.iii. 1, “Put them in mind to obey magistrates,” *πειθαρχουν, &c.* Thus, also, Homer in his Iliad, book i, line 79th, speaking of Agammemnon, the captain-general of the Greeks, says, ‘Ος μεγα παντων Αργειων κρατει, και οι πειθονται Αχαιοι; “Who rules supreme over all the Greeks, and whom the Greeks *obey*,”—not comply with in his advice. And in line 33d, mentioning the obedience of Chryses to the command of this prince, accompanied with the most terrible denunciations of punishment, he says, ‘Ος φησ’ ἰδδισιν δ’ ο γερων, και επιβητο μυθω; “He spoke, and the old man trembled, and obeyed his word,”—not certainly acquiesced in his advice from persuasion, for every feeling of his soul revolted against his obedience. In the sense, moreover, of obedience it appears evidently to be taken in this passage in the Hebrews, if we attend to its connection with the verb *ὑπεικω*, and its being used to denote the duty of Christians to their *ἡγεμονς*, which is rendered by our translators rulers, and which, as we have already shewn, most frequently signifies governors. Mere compliance with advice, however, is not so much the duty of inferiors to rulers, as such, as obedience is; and consequently our translators, in the passage before us, have very judiciously rendered *πειθεσθε* “*obey*.”



tioned in scripture\*. It is a metaphorical expression, derived originally from the subjection and obedience of soldiers to their commanders, than which usually nothing is more submissive. It is employed to express the obedience of children to their parents, who unquestionably are possessed of authority over them; for it is the very word which denotes the subjection of the blessed Jesus to his parents, Luke ii. 51; and is the same word which is used, 1 Tim. iii. 4, when it is said, "Having his children in subjection with all gravity." It signifies the subjection of servants to their masters, who undoubtedly are invested with authority over them, and can prescribe to them whatever services they choose, without soliciting their consent and approbation. Thus, Tit. ii. 9, "Exhort servants to be obedient (*ὑποτασσέσθαι*) unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering them again:" and 1 Pet. ii. 18, "Servants, be subject to your masters *with all fear*," *ὑποτασσόμενοι ἐν παντί φόβῳ*. Besides, it is the most common expression for denoting the obedience of subjects to their civil rulers, who are entitled not merely to advise, but to govern them by the exercise of authority. Thus, Rom. xiii. 1, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers," *ὑποτασσέσθω*; and again, ver. 5, "Wherefore ye must needs be subject (*ὑποτασσέσθαι*), not only for wrath, but for conscience sake." Thus, too, in Titus iii. 1, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers," *ὑποτασσέσθαι*; and thus, likewise, in 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," *ὑποταγῆτε*. And, in short, although this word in a single instance be used *metaphorically*, to denote submission where no authority is possessed, (1 Peter v. 5), in every other instance it signifies submission from inferiors to superiors, where, however diversified, from the variety of the relation, that subjection may be, it always implies submission to *authority*. But if the most entire submission, not merely to advice but to authority, which the nature of the relation can possibly admit, be almost invariably denoted by this word, and if this very term be employed to express the submission

\* And yet this very word denotes even the obedience, in the passage referred to, which was to be given to *deacons* in the execution of *their* office, as well as the obedience which was to be yielded also to every higher office-bearer in his function, "who helped: with Paul, and laboured."

which is due from the members of the church to those who are their rulers, is it not obvious that the latter are entitled, not merely to advise, but authoritatively to govern the church of Christ? And if it be alleged, that, though this term is employed in scripture to express the obedience of Christians to their rulers, it cannot be proved from it that they are to be subject to them, considered as invested with authority, any farther than they are disposed to adopt their advice; upon the same principle it ought to be evinced, that as the same term is used to denote the submission of children to their parents, and servants to their masters, and subjects to their civil governors, the latter are not entitled to claim from the former in any instance, subjection to their authority, but simply acquiescence in their counsels. But if such a meaning would be considered as inadmissible, because totally subversive of the duties which are due in civil life to parents, and masters, and magistrates, must it not be equally inadmissible in the present instance, because no less subversive, not merely of that acquiescence in their advice, but of that *subjection* to their authority, which seems naturally to be suggested from it, as due from the people to their ecclesiastical rulers?

If the rulers of the church, then, are not entitled to authority, it would appear that the language of the sacred oracles, though dictated by inspiration, in this particular at least, must be considered as incorrect. It has employed not merely one term, but a number of terms, which, in their natural, and unforced, and most frequent acceptation, plainly assign to ecclesiastical rulers an authoritative power, while at the same time it is certain that such a power was never intended to be intrusted with them. Instead therefore of being fitted to make Christians perfect, and furnishing them thoroughly for every good work, has it not tended rather to bewilder and mislead the church, and led it to flatter that desire of authority which is so natural to man, by granting to her rulers, in every age, a degree of power which they ought never to have enjoyed? From this charge, moreover, it seems totally impossible to vindicate the scripture, unless it be supposed that the terms which it uses upon this interesting subject are just and accurate, are to be understood in their obvious and common signification, and are intended to suggest that ecclesiastical rulers are to govern the church

not merely by advice and persuasion, but by the exercise of authority.

The sum then of what has been said in the preceding remarks is briefly this—That the rulers of the church in every age, according to Presbyterians, are invested not only with a power of advice, but of authority—That this power, however, is only ministerial and subordinate, not supreme and legislative—That this power, though decried and condemned by Independents, is the same with what is claimed by the majority of each of their different congregations over the minority—That it affords to all who are under its controul, every mean of information that is necessary to produce an enlightened and voluntary obedience—That forbearance can be granted in inferior matters, even where *it* is exercised, no less than among Independents, to all who cannot fully comply with its commands—And that in more important points where they cannot acquiesce, liberty is granted them to retire from that connection, no less than among them—That the exercise of this power is absolutely essential to the existence of society—that to admit the people to judge and vote before a decision is made, is only to transfer it to them from the rulers—that such a transference constitutes those the *governors* of the church who are bound to *obey*—That the names bestowed in the sacred oracles upon ecclesiastical rulers, and the terms employed in them to describe the nature of the obedience of members, are directly contradictory to such a plan—And, in short, that the only thing which preserves order, and discipline, and government, even *in the congregations of Independents*, is their *practically* renouncing their favourite idea of administering only by advice and persuasion, and acting upon the *Presbyterian* principle of authority. To this it may be farther added, that if this form of government, which vests in the rulers the authority for which we contend, appears to be incompatible with *religious* liberty, because every member is not permitted to vote, and adopt or reject the decisions of the rulers, upon the same principle it may be demonstrated, that it is no less inconsistent with *civil liberty*, to commit to the rulers the *government* of the *state*; and that before any decision be made by the magistrates of a city, or county, or kingdom, the people should be convened and their votes collected. But as such a principle would be considered as preposterous in civil polity, must it

not be equally so in ecclesiastical government \*? and consequently, must not that view of the independence of the ru-

\* How astonishing then, if such only be the authority for which Presbyterians contend, that it should be the ground of such virulent reprehension to Independents! One of them, before quoted, (see Watt's Plain Proof, p. 176), exclaims with much keenness against their office-bearers, for claiming a power "only ministerially" "to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience." "Here," says he, "they determine not only how a man is to act, and how he is to be treated outwardly; but, as it were, interpose between man and his Maker, and dictate what he is to believe." But will this writer prove, or will any Independent prove, that Presbyterian rulers assume a higher power, in the decision of these points, over their members, than is assumed by the majority of an Independent church over the minority? Or can they demonstrate, that the former interpose more between Christians and their Maker in *their* communion, or dictate more to them what they are to believe, than is necessarily done, (though they seem to disclaim it) by the majority to the minority in each of their churches?

"It is said," adds this writer, (p. 177), "that the decrees of their office-bearers, *if consonant to the word of God*, are to be received with submission." Westmin. Confes. chap. xxxi. sect. iii. "This," says he, "seems, at first view, to remove the exceptionableness of this power; but when the matter is viewed more closely, the case alters. Whether are the courts themselves to decide, whether their decrees are consonant to the word of God; or, are those who are to receive these decrees, to judge of this every one for himself? The latter supposition, in a great measure, destroys the idea of authority and submission. We are to submit to decrees as far as we think them right, *i. e.* as far as we please. This seems not to be *submission*. This absurdity is avoided; the courts themselves judge whether their decisions are or are not right. They generally affirm the decrees, and bind the church-members to the former decrees; and also to their sentence, that those decrees are consonant to the word of God. And thus they bind them under sanction of excommunication."

To this, however, it is replied, by demanding whether the *majority* in an Independent congregation, when they pass a decree, do not claim also an exclusive power of judging as to its consonancy to the word of God, as much as the rulers of any Presbyterian court? Do they not announce to all who are *to remain* in their communion, that they must receive that decree *as the mind of God*, as really as Presbyterians do to the members of their churches? And do they not tell all who *apply to them for membership*, that they must admit such decrees as a just representation of *the mind of God*, upon the points to which they relate, as much as the rulers of Presbyterian churches? If the latter then, when they exercise this power over the members, are reprobated because they assume what is denominated by Independents an undue authority, must

lers on the votes of the members, to procure efficiency to their measures, which is held by independents, be altogether rejected as subversive of the administration of the church of Christ?

not the same objections present themselves against the former, who assume a power no less high and commanding? "Do not they also *themselves*," as well as the rulers in a Presbyterian court, "judge whether their decrees are or are not right? Do not they" as generally "affirm their decrees, and bind the minority and every new applicant, as well as the church at large, to receive these decrees; and also *to their sentence, that these decrees are consonant to the word of God?* And do not they thus bind them under sanction of excommunication?" And, in short, because Presbyterians invite their members to compare their decrees with the word of God, that when they receive these decrees, they may yield to them not a blind but an enlightened obedience, does this "destroy at once submission and authority?" If so, since, even by *the confession of Independents*, this is all that is claimed by Presbyterians, as far at least as *their system* is concerned, there is no more tyrannical authority or improper subjection, notwithstanding all their assertions, among the one than among the other. It seems strange, besides, that the permission which is granted by Presbyterians to their members, to examine these decrees, and satisfy themselves as to their propriety or impropriety, should be considered by Independents as completely nullifying the authority of the rulers and the submission of the people. While no one is compelled to admit these decrees before examination and conviction, is not every one told, as in an Independent church, that if, upon inquiry, he will not obey these decrees, he cannot enjoy the privilege of membership? And where this is announced, however extensive the liberty of inquiry which is permitted by Presbyterian rulers to their members, and though they do not force them to admit their decrees, or remain in their communion, any more than is done by the majority to the minority in Independent congregations, will it follow from this, that the authority of the one, and the submission of the other, are destroyed by such privileges?



## LETTER III.

SIR,

IN the preceding Letter I have attempted to shew, that an authoritative power is not only exercised in general by the rulers of the church in every party, but is their just prerogative from the united evidence of reason and scripture. It follows naturally, under our second division, to examine who are the persons that are to be invested with this power in a particular congregation, whether the members in general, as some Independents explicitly, and all other Independents indirectly affirm, or only a few, denominated elders, to whom, according to the Presbyterian scheme, the exercise of government is exclusively committed?

Here, indeed, it is but justice to remark, that there is a certain pre-eminence, in point of power, which is granted by Independents to their elders or pastors. It is their province, they allow, to sit as presidents in the meetings of their churches, and preserve order; to prepare the business which is to be the subject of discussion for being laid before the members, and state the decision which appears to them most consonant to the mind of God; and after the members have finally determined, to announce that determination, and to require submission to it from the various persons connected with their societies. If a case, moreover, occurs, where the number of voters on each side of a question happens to be equal, they submit the point to the vote of their elder who presides at the time. In all other respects, however, their power is the same with that of even the lowest members of the church\*.

\* Some Independents, indeed, have asserted with Glass, that as the elders are furnished with superior gifts for representing the authority of Christ in his word, and with more spiritual wisdom to apply it to the conscience, they are entitled to superior power in the church. But is it not evident, that if their power results from *their gifts* and not from their *office*, and is to be proportioned to the degree of them which they are supposed to possess, every *member* who is believed to have *equal* qualifications, must be entitled also to an *equality* of power; and every member, who is imagined to have *superior* wisdom, and whose labours as a pastor are not needed by the church, must have a right, even to an influence, *superior* to that of her elders and *nominal rulers* in all their determinations? Besides, whatever may be the gifts and endowments of the elders, as their proposals are subjected to the opinion and vote



But to admit the members, in general, of a church to an equality of power with those who are *nominally* invested with the rule, appears to be improper for the following reasons.

In the first place, Most of the members of a church are commonly *unqualified* for the exercise of such power ; and to suppose that Jesus, the King of Zion, has warranted those whom he has not qualified to exercise this authority is worse than contradictory. But that the *greater* part of the members of a church are not so qualified, Mr. Ewing, as was remarked, has already acknowledged in the most decided terms. He grants that such is the state of the people, that a few of the most active spirit and readiest elocution will usually be able to sway a congregation ; and that such is the collected ignorance of the brethren, and such their collected infirmities and corruption, that it would be extremely dangerous to the cause of truth, and of Christian *liberty*, to make every thing that ought to be done, even though trivial and obvious, wait for discussion in full assembly. And this representation unquestionably accords with fact. How many are there, in every congregation, who, though undoubtedly attached to the cause of Christ, and though so far acquainted with the doctrines of his gospel as seems necessary to salvation, are persons of very feeble powers and very limited information ! Are there not many among them, who, in the language of scripture, are *weak*, as well as others who are strong ; many who are but *babes and children* in Christ, as well as others who are fathers ? Nay, it will perhaps be found upon a candid survey, that the *majority* of those who are received as members, even in the best regulated churches, though they understand so much of the doctrines of the gospel as entitles them, if attended by a correspondent practice, to the privilege of communion, are, in some measure at least, of this description. The original faculties of many of them are weak ; the degree of culture which they have received in youth is comparatively scanty : from the attention which is requisite to their secular employments, they can find but little time in their future life

of the members at large, before they can be considered as decisions binding upon the church, all that superiority of power which, in profession and title, they attribute to the elders, must be completely annihilated.

for intellectual improvement; and even that little, if they are men of piety, is almost entirely devoted to the instruction of their families, or the acquisition of such knowledge as is subservient merely to their personal religion. Whatever, in short, may be the attainments of others, are there not many among them, whom, though you could not exclude from the table of the Lord on account of any defect in their piety, you would not intrust with a very inferior share in the management even of your temporal affairs? Are there not many to be found among them, to whom, though men of the most amiable characters, you could not commit even the lowest offices in the government of the state, or the guardianship simply of your *external* interests, where no extraordinary knowledge or wisdom was required? Can you suppose then for a moment, that the King of Zion has constituted such persons the governors of his church? Can you believe that he has appointed every such member, however weak, who has a right, from the evidences of his saving knowledge, and child-like holiness, to the sacrament of the supper, to be a judge also in the most important and difficult matters which regard the dearest interests of his people? Nay, is it possible to admit, as must evidently be the case upon the Independents' scheme, that though *the majority of the members of a particular congregation* be of this description, he has committed to them the power of judging respecting every matter the most dubious and momentous that concerns the most valuable rights of their brethren; and that this plan is more conducive to the promotion of truth, and the administration of equal and impartial justice, than that which vests this power in a few of the wisest and most enlightened of the members, together with the teachers?

It is of importance still farther to be remarked, that strongly as this difficulty appears to militate against the scheme of Independency in the present age, it must be much more formidable, if we attend to the church at a more early period, or in a less favourable situation. If even in our own country, where the means of information have so long and so plentifully been enjoyed by all, very few are qualified to be ecclesiastical rulers, must not the number of these in the primitive ages, when they had just emerged from the superstition of Judaism or the darkness of Heathenism, and were in some measure shackled by their former prejudices—when the opportunities also of general knowledge were much less

abundant, and when the copies of the scriptures, from their ignorance of printing, were both less numerous, and few but the pastors of the church could read them—must not the number, I say, of those who were qualified to be ecclesiastical rulers at that period have been greatly more limited? And if even among ourselves, so few are fitted for this arduous work, should the gospel be propagated in Pagan countries, as among the Caffres, or inhabitants of Owhyhee or Otaheite, would not the individuals who would be found, in their different congregations, capable of judging upon every point of doctrine or government, however difficult, be much less numerous? Every Caffrè or Hottentot however, upon the Independent scheme, who seemed to have as much knowledge as is necessary for salvation, and was enabled to exhibit a corresponding practice, would be recognized in effect as a ruler of the church; and to the judgment and vote of an assembly of such men, would every proposal of their elders, however superior in knowledge, necessarily be subjected, before they could be adopted and acted upon in their congregations\*.

2dly, It seems clearly to be taught in scripture, that the power of ruling, whether by persuasion and advice, or by ministerial authority, is committed to *some* only, and not to all the members of the church indiscriminately. “Salute all them that have the rule over you,” says Paul to the Hebrews, (Heb. xiii. 24), “and all the saints.” Now, as we have already proved that the word which is here translated rulers, most probably signifies, not merely presidents or governors by advice and persuasion, but *authoritative rulers*, is it not a natural consequence from the phraseology

\* How would Messrs. Ewing or Little relish the submission of all their measures to the cognizance of *such* a court? Or, if pastors of congregations, like those mentioned by Paul, Heb. v. 12, (and if there were such congregations then, there may be many similar to them now), who, while they might have been teachers, needed to be taught again what were the first principles of the oracles of God; if pastors, I say, of such congregations, would they be willing that every point, however *difficult* and *important*, should be subjected to their judgment, and determined by *their vote*? In presbytery, however, though there was not one of a congregation fitted to be an elder, to assist the pastor in the government of the church, this want could be supplied, by having recourse to the ministers of other churches met as a classical court of review, an expedient which is utterly impracticable to Independents.

in this passage, that as the saints are here distinguished from their rulers, every Christian member is not entitled to be *such* a ruler? Or, if it mean simply, as Independents alledge, persons who are to govern by advice and persuasion, is it not equally plain from it, that every saint is not to be *such* a governor\*? “God,” says the same Apostle (1 Cor. xii. 28), “hath set *some* in the church, first, apostles; secondarily, “prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that miracles; then “gifts of healing, helps, *governments*.”—Here it is necessary to remark, that in the whole of this context, from the 12th verse, the Apostle is speaking of the church of Christ under the emblem of his body, and affirms that in it there is a variety of offices adapted to the comfort and convenience of the whole, as in the natural body there is a variety of members, each of which is necessary to its happiness, and all of which are essential to its beauty. This variety of members, in the natural body, he asserts to be a proof of the Creator’s wisdom, and contends that it is not only beneficial to the interests of the whole, but that such is the dependence of one member upon another, that none of them has a right to look down with contempt upon the less honourable members. “For the body is not one member,” says he (ver. 14), “but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? if the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But

\* Glass, and other Independents, translate the word *ἡγεμονες*, which is rendered in our Bibles, rulers, *guides*. This, however, as was before evinced, is contrary to its usual acceptation in the New Testament, where it generally signifies rulers or governors. Besides, how could this term, upon the principles of Independents, if it signifies merely *guides* who had a right only to advise, be applied exclusively to the *elders* of the church? As the *members* indiscriminately, according to them, have a right to advise as well as the elders, nay, as the opinion of the former may be adopted occasionally by the congregation, while that of the latter is rejected and set aside, have not the members frequently an equal, if not a superior title to this name, of being guides to their ministers or elders?

“ now are they many members, yet but one body. And  
 “ the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee ;  
 “ nor, again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you,  
 “ &c.” After which he informs us (ver. 27), that *believers* are the body of Christ ; and observes, that in this body (ver. 28), God hath set a variety of offices for its edification, as striking, and distinct, and necessary, as the different members of the natural body. These offices he enumerates, and mentions among them, first, “ apostles ;” secondarily, “ prophets ;” thirdly, “ teachers ;” then “ miracles,” *i. e.* as is plain from ver. 29, workers of miracles ; then “ gifts of healing,” *i. e.* as is evident from the 30th verse, persons who have the gifts of healing ; then “ helps,” *i. e.* persons who are helps ; and then “ governments,” *i. e.* persons who are governors. Now, as he himself remarks, in stating this comparison (ver. 17, 18), that *every* member of the natural body is not an eye, nor an ear, nor endowed by its Creator with the sense of smelling, is it not equally incontestable, that when he also tells us, that in the church of Christ, which is his body, there is a diversity of offices no less striking, and that God hath set in it only *some* governments or governors, *every* member of that church cannot be entitled to the privilege of being a governor, whether this governor is to rule, as Independents say, by advice and persuasion, or, as Presbyterians contend, by the exercise of authoritative though subordinate power ? On the whole, is it not manifest, that if the Apostle denies in the 29th verse, that *all* were to be apostles, because he had said in the 28th verse, that only *some* were to be apostles ; and that *all* were to be prophets, because God hath set in the church only *some* to be prophets ; and that *all* were to be teachers, because he had said before, that only *some* were to be teachers ; is it not also manifest upon the very same principle, that as he had said before too, that God had set in the church only *some* governments or governors, *all* who are members of Christ’s spiritual body are not to be admitted to be governors in his church, whatever may be the nature and degree of that power which these governors should exercise ?

Is it affirmed, in answer to this, according to the ideas of some Independents, that the Apostle, when speaking here of governments, intends not an *office*, but simply a gift or qualification for government, and that no argument of course, for excluding the members of the church in general from



being ecclesiastical rulers, can be deduced from its being said, that “ God hath set in the church only some governments?” We reply, that the argument against this first principle of Independency seems equally conclusive, whether the Apostle is speaking of an office, or of a gift ; for, if he intends not an office, but merely a gift, will it not equally follow upon their mode of reasoning, that since those alone are to rule in the church on whom God has bestowed qualifications or gifts for government, and since, by their own confession, it is here declared that he has bestowed these gifts only upon *some*, *all* cannot be entitled to be rulers in his church ? Besides, that the Apostle is here speaking of an office, and not simply of endowments, appears, among other things, from the original word here translated “ set” or “ constituted” in the church, which always, in such a connection as this, when the case admits it, denotes the appointment of persons to an office. It is so understood in this very passage, when it is said, that God hath set in the church, some apostles, and some prophets, and some teachers ; and since by governments, as was before attempted to be proved, is here intended governors, there appears to be no reason for understanding it in a different sense when applied to *them*. It is the same word too which is used (Acts xx. 28), to express the appointment of the Ephesian elders, and not merely their *gifts*, to the official oversight of that Christian church : “ Take heed therefore unto yourselves, “ and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath “ *made*” (ἐποίησε), or *set*, or *appointed* “ you overseers :” and is the very word which is employed, (2 Tim. i. 11), to denote the appointment of the Apostle Paul to his office :— “ Whereunto I am appointed (ἐρρέθυ) a preacher, and an “ apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.” Is it contended, moreover\*, that even allowing that an office is here intended by governments, it is deacons who are referred to ? To this it is answered, that the Apostle seems already to have mentioned these under the name of helps ; and that, at any rate, it is not the province of deacons, *as such*, to govern, but merely to serve tables, a meaning undoubtedly too limited and inadequate for the strong word which is here used by the Apostle to signify governments. Or is it alleged†, that

\* See Chandler on Joel, p. 150.

† See Dr. Watt on the Christian Church, p. 73.



admitting the word to signify properly ecclesiastical rulers, what is here intended by it may have now ceased, as well as workers of miracles, persons endowed with the gift of healing and of tongues, and apostles and prophets, who are mentioned along with them? To this it is answered, that even upon the principles of Independents themselves, while miracles have ceased, and tongues and prophecies have failed, government will for ever continue in the church: and that if we are to infer, from its being here joined with the gifts of miracles and tongues, that it must now be laid aside, we contend that it must be laid aside by Independents as well as by Presbyterians; and upon the same principle it may be proved, that since *teachers* also are here mentioned along with them, the office of a teacher should no longer be continued in the church of Christ.

Upon a review then of the Apostle's reasoning in the whole of this passage, I feel disposed to conclude that *all* are no more now entitled to be rulers, than they were entitled formerly to be apostles or prophets, or pastors and teachers; and that, in Christ's spiritual body, all are no more authorized to be governors, as they are obviously warranted upon the Independent plan, than, in the natural body, each of the members is to be an eye, or an ear, or a sense of smelling. This reasoning, I apprehend, is no less conclusive against admitting them to rule, even upon *the scheme of Independents*, by *advice* and *persuasion*, than, upon the scheme of Presbyterians, by the exercise of limited subordinate authority.

In the 3d place, The terms employed in scripture to express the various characters and relations of members and their elders seem also to intimate that every Christian is not warranted to claim an equal share of ecclesiastical government. While the rulers, as has been observed, are distinguished in the New Testament by the strongest titles expressive of the office and authority of *governors*, the members, as has been said, are pointed out at the same time as *governed* by them, and are enjoined to obey them. But if every Christian among those who are governed (the point of presiding as moderator in their assemblies, and announcing the decision, alone excepted) be as much a governor as the governors themselves, how can the distinction which we have mentioned be preserved? Must not *all* be *governors*, and *all* be *governed*? and must not the kingdom of Jesus be dis-

tinguished by a circumstance not only peculiar to itself, but which would be considered as impolitic and contradictory in every wise and well-regulated human government ; namely, that all its *subjects* should not only be subjects, but *rulers*, and as much, or rather *more* entitled, on account of their number, to the character of rulers than the governors themselves ? While the former, too, are affirmed, (Acts xx. 28), to be authoritative overseers of the church, as the captains of hundreds and thousands were of their men \*, and as the rulers of cities were of the inhabitants of these cities †, the members of the church are said to be officially overseen by them in *government* as well as in doctrine. But if every member, as Independents assert, be not only as much an overseer of the church at large as the overseers themselves, but, as was before evinced, from their superior number, possessed of a far greater share of the oversight—nay, if, as was also noticed, they can completely overturn the proposals of the overseers, and dictate to them what *they* are to receive and obey, is not the distinction which we have stated completely destroyed ? and are not *all* not only *overseers* as well as *overseen*, but are not the very men who are appointed to be *overseen*, *more worthy* of being dignified by this honourable name, than the men who are *officially characterized* by it ? While the former are described as the *flock*, the latter are represented in scripture as the *pastors*, a name often bestowed upon authoritative civil rulers and officers ‡, and are enjoined to perform the part of pastors to the church of God ; *i. e.* not only to feed them with wholesome doctrine, but also to govern them as a shepherd does his flock §.—

\* See the passages produced, Letter II, where this very word is applied to them.

† See 1 Maccab. chap. i, where this same term is so used ; *Και ποιησεν επισκοπους επι παντα τον λαον*, “ And made them overseers of “ the whole people.”

‡ See Isaiah xlv. 28, where it is given to Cyrus, king of Persia ; 2 Sam. v. 2, where it is bestowed upon David, because, as a military officer under Saul, he had led out and brought in Israel ; and to the judges of Israel, 1 Chron. xvii. 6, whom God is there said to have commanded to *feed* or govern his people. See also Homer's *Iliad passim*, where the common name for Agamemnon, the leader and commander of the Grecian host, is *ποιμην λαων*, shepherd of the people.

§ Compare Matth. ii. 6, where the very word which is employed in Acts xx. 28, to signify the pastoral oversight of the elders at

But if each of the flock, as must be the case upon the Independent plan, is to govern not only the other members of the flock, but even the *pastors* themselves, as much as *they* are to govern the members, how can this difference of character be maintained? Is not every sheep in the flock of Christ, according to this scheme, not only a *sheep*, but a *pastor*? nay, are they not *better* entitled, upon the principles of Independents, as already mentioned, to the name of pastors, than those who are in scripture distinguished by that appellation? Since, then, it seems impossible to allow the members of the church in general the power of ruling, without making them at once *all governors*, as well as *all governed*, *all overseers* as well as *all overseen*, and *all pastors* as well as *all sheep*; nay, since, from their superior number, which is often twenty or a hundred times greater than that of the ministers, it would make them *more really* governors, and overseers, and pastors, than the governors and overseers, and pastors themselves; the plan of Independency, which is attended with such consequences, must certainly be inadmissible, and we are bound to conclude that believers in general are not to govern in the Church of God.

It is not enough to tell us, that, at least upon *your* plan of administration, the members of the church are not considered as *rulers* when they express their sentiments upon any question, but are simply asked, for the satisfaction of the elders, by whom any measure is proposed, to deliver their opinion, and state their vote. Nor is it enough to say, that they do not receive the *appellation* of *rulers*, if, in their capacity of church-members, they actually possess and exercise an authority at least equal, if not superior to that of the rulers themselves. That such authority is possessed by them, appears to be incontrovertible. Is not the judgment of the members, as Mr. Ewing informs us, (p. 36), to be taken in *every* question, if a matter of importance, and are not all of

Ephesus over their members, is used to denote the pastoral conduct of Jesus, not only as teaching, but *ruling* his people. "Out of thee," says that Evangelist respecting the Saviour, "shall come a Governor that shall rule, ποιᾶναι, shall govern as a shepherd my people Israel." Consult, likewise, Rev. ii. 27, xii. 5, and xix. 15, where the same word which is used to express what the elders at Ephesus were authorized to perform as the shepherds or pastors of the flock, signifies to *rule*, as in other places it means to feed by instruction.

them indiscriminately admitted to vote? You yourself too declare, (p. 30), that “*nothing* is to be done without the “*consent* of the members.” Mr. Little also, in his letter to Mr. Donald, one of the members excommunicated from the church in Perth, tells him, “that *the church* were to consider “his case, and that of the other members who were excommunicated with him.” (See his Letter, as inserted at large in the Narrative before mentioned.) And when that case was considered, it is asserted by these persons who were thus excluded, and not denied by Mr Little, that the roll containing the names of the members of the church was called, and their votes marked, before the deed of the elders was viewed as ratified. Does not the adoption or rejection of any measure depend entirely upon a *majority of them*? and if such a majority are pleased to set aside any proposal of the elders or *nominal* rulers, will it not be set aside? and if they are disposed to vote for an opposite opinion, will it not be carried in opposition to their rulers; and be binding upon their rulers, as much as upon any of the members, if they remain in their society? This, I believe, cannot be denied. I contend, therefore, that even upon *your* plan of Independency, as well as in every other which grants a power of deliberating and voting to your members at large, though you deny them the name and title of rulers, and allow them only, as you express it, a power of consent, they enjoy not only *as much* but *more* of the *real* authority of rulers, than those to whom, according to the words of your brother, the government of your churches is committed *nominally*; and consequently, that *your* scheme in particular, as well as that of Independents in general, seems justly chargeable with the inconsistencies which have been mentioned, or may yet be charged upon it, from the word of God.

4thly, Terms are used in scripture expressive of the duties of Christian members to their ecclesiastical rulers, which appear no less clearly to intimate that Christians in general are not to be governors of the church of God. They are required, for instance, (1 Thess. v. 13), to *know* their rulers, or those who are *over them* in the Lord; *i. e.* to *acknowledge* them as such. Now, as the word here rendered those who were *over them* in the Lord, as has been already remarked, means not merely those who presided in their assemblies, but authoritative rulers, who had a right to

deliver decisions in the name of Christ and demand their obedience ; I cannot see how this duty could be enjoined upon the members in general, if all of them in *reality*, though not in name, were as much governors as their rulers or presbyters. *Every Christian member*, upon the Independent scheme, being as much a ruler as any of the elders, would require to be acknowledged *as such equally* with them ; nay, the majority of the rulers, on this plan, being members, and of course their influence being *greater*, it appears *as fit*, and perhaps *more consistent*, that the elders should be called to acknowledge *them* as rulers, than that they should be enjoined to acknowledge the elders. Not only are the members commanded in general to acknowledge their rulers as such, but to *esteem them very highly* in love for their works sake, in ruling, if they barely ruled ; as well as in preaching, if they also preached. The original words, which denote the degree of esteem that is due to them, are most uncommonly expressive, ὑπερ ἐκπερισσοῦ ; i. e. literally rendered, “*above the greatest abundance, or exceeding exceedingly highly.*” But how could Christians in general be required to render to their elders *such an extraordinary respect*, if all that distinguished them from common members were merely that they were to be presidents in the assemblies of the church, while an equal share of rule belongs to every member in particular ; nay, while it is certain that, as the judgment and votes of the members in every question are to fix the decision, the power of government is *chiefly* in them ? Are not *the members*, at least as far as government is concerned, upon the Independent plan, *better* entitled to this *exceedingly, exceedingly high* esteem, for the effects of good government, than *the elders themselves* ? Farther, Christians are ordered, (1 Tim. v. 17), to reckon the elders who rule well, *on account of their ruling*, worthy even of *double honour*, and to give them that *honour*. But if every member is to be a ruler of the church, as well as the elders, will it not follow from this, that if *any* of the *members* rule well, double honour should be granted to them as well as to the elders ; and if *all the members* rule well, will it not equally follow, that *all the members* should give to *all the members* double honour, because they rule well ? To talk, however, of all the members of a church giving to all the members, if they ruled well, double honour, is evidently absurd. And to



consider the Apostle as requiring *honour* from the members of the church to the elders, when, by this scheme, they have an equal, if not a superior share of ecclesiastic power to these very elders, seems a palpable contradiction. *Honour* can be rendered only by an inferior to a superior, and *double honour* can be given only by one who is very inferior to one who is greatly superior. But in an Independent congregation, which admits every member to an equal share in the government, no such inferiority can exist. Or, if the word here translated *honour*, signifies not only *honour*, but maintenance, as Guyse and other Independents have maintained; and if it be asserted from this passage, that the elders who rule well, are entitled, if they need it, to *double maintenance*; it will also follow, that if every member is to be an ecclesiastical ruler, *he* would be entitled also, if he ruled well, to *double maintenance*. This, however, is no less absurd; for where could the church be found, whose funds could admit of such an expenditure? In fine, Christians are commanded, as was remarked, to *obey* their rulers, (Heb. xiii. 17); *i. e.* not merely to be subject to them as one Christian is to another, but to render an obedience such as inferiors do to superiors. But if, according to the principles of independency, every member is to have an equal voice in every determination with those who are elders, and if he is in reality a ruler, whatever he may be in name, as well as they; who are the persons that are to perform this command?

If those only who are distinct from the rulers can obey them, then, according to your plan, none can comply with this apostolic injunction, because *all* are rulers; and consequently we are reduced to this absurd supposition, that the Apostle commands the rulers to obey themselves. This manifest absurdity is equally supposed, whatever be the kind of obedience that is enjoined, whether it be compliance with persuasion, or submission to authority. As it therefore appears impossible to explain these exhortations consistently, if every member has in reality, though perhaps not in name, an equal title with elders to rule the church, the principle which such contradictions suppose, must be rejected; and, by consequence, it must still be affirmed that every individual Christian has not a right to be a ruler in the church of God.

## LETTER IV.

SIR,

IN addition to the arguments which have already been urged in refutation of your scheme, there are others, from which its contrariety to the sacred oracles is no less apparent. I therefore observe in the

5th place, That the keys, which are the emblem of subordinate authority in the kingdom of Jesus, are represented in scripture as delivered by him to the ministers, and not to the members.

With regard to the import of the celebrated passage in Matth. xvi, where Jesus is said to have bestowed upon Peter these keys of his kingdom, much diversity of sentiment has obtained. Papists contend that it includes a grant of universal supremacy over the church on earth to Peter, as the representative of the Saviour, which grant they suppose to be transferred to their popes, who, according to them, are the successors of this Apostle. But even though they could prove that their popes were the legitimate successors of Peter (in proving which they have as yet uniformly failed), this passage contains no such grant to them; for, in other places, the rest of the Apostles are pointed out as invested with an equality of power, and as even withstanding him to the face on a particular occasion, because he was to be blamed. Episcopalians alledge that he represented their bishops, to whom, upon their scheme, the government of the church is chiefly committed. But it is plain that no such bishops as theirs are authorized by scripture, which points out to us a *plurality* of bishops or overseers in many primitive churches (see Philip. i. 1. Acts xx. 17. 28, &c.); and informs us at the same time, that by these we are to understand elders or ministers, who preached and ruled (see also for this, Acts xx. 1 Pet. v. 1, 2, 3, &c.) Independents assert, that here Peter represents believers in general, to whom, according to them, the government of the church of Jesus is intrusted. The reasons on which they build this interpretation are these: That the gift of the keys was conferred on Peter, upon his confessing Jesus to be the Son of God; and, consequently, should be conferred on all who make this confession; and the name Peter or Rock, which was given to this Apostle

upon this occasion, belongs, they say, equally to all believers, who are, no less than he, spiritual stones, built upon the same holy and blessed foundation. It seems probable, however, that the name Peter, or the Rock, as bestowed upon this Apostle, is not the same with that which is elsewhere given to believers in general, when they are denominated Stones, and living Stones\* ; nor does it follow that because they possess, in common with him, *one* part of the honour which he is here declared to have received, they are entitled to the other also. The *gift of the keys* is undoubtedly very different from that of being *a stone built up by God's Spirit on the true foundation*, and the enjoyment of the one can never necessarily imply the possession of the other. Besides, though it should be conceded, that the grant of the keys was made to Peter because he confessed Christ to be the Son of God, it cannot be inferred, on any consistent principle, that *every one* who confesses him is to receive that honour. We know that this Apostle, on another memorable occasion (see John xxi.), when he not only professed his faith, but his love to the Saviour, was anew authorized by him to be a preacher and an Apostle† ; but there are few, I believe, who, from this circumstance, would conclude with a celebrated minister, “ that *every* man (however weak) who can lay his hand on his heart, and say he *loves* Christ, has Christ's call and warrant to preach the gospel.” But if few would adduce this as a proof that all who are possessed of a similar affection should have the office of a *minister*, on what principle can it be demonstrated, that, though Peter was invested by Jesus with the office of a *ruler* on his confessing his *faith*, all who are possessed of *similar faith* should have a *similar function* ? Nor will the nature of the deed itself authorize it ; for by confessing Jesus, and by being built up on him as a living stone, a person becomes merely a member of his family, and a subject of his kingdom. But is it a legitimate inference, that because a person becomes a *subject* of his kingdom, and a *member* of his house, he is advanced in consequence of it to the office of a *steward*, to whose power, as expressed by the usual badge which he anciently wore (a golden key carried on his shoulder), there is an evident allusion in the phraseology before us ? Were this the case, it

\* See Whitby on the place.

† “ Feed my sheep ; feed my lambs.”

would be a natural consequence that every person who becomes a believer, and a living stone, would be constituted also a *steward* in the house of God, to rule and govern it; and in the family of Christ, all would be *stewards*, as well as *governed*. But if *all* were *stewards*, where were those who should be *governed* by them? Though, therefore, Peter, on this *remarkable occasion*, when a clearer discovery was to be made by Jesus of his character and kingdom than hitherto was done, received from him the assurance that he had committed to him the keys of his kingdom, and advanced him to the honour of being a ruler in it, it will not follow that *every Christian*, who believes and confesses him on *every occasion*, is to receive that dignity. Does it follow that if a prince, at a *particular time*, to testify his approbation of the views entertained of his character and government by one of his subjects, advances him to special honour, *every one* of his subjects who expresses similar views, at *every future period*, and on *every occasion*, should attain a similar honour? Neither, therefore, of the arguments which have been urged, evince that Peter represented believers in general, when he received at this time the keys of the kingdom; and the obvious meaning of the expressions employed to denote this trust, which plainly refer to the office of a steward, seems totally incompatible with this idea.

It is indeed said (Matth. xviii.), that “whatsoever the church binds on earth,” agreeably to the will of Jesus) “shall be bound in heaven; and that whatsoever they loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven;” which is the same language that accompanies the gift of the keys to Peter, (chap. xvi.): but, I trust, it will afterwards appear that we are not here to understand, by the term church, every particular member. On the contrary, we know that language almost exactly similar is employed by our Saviour, to express the power which he gave to his *ministers*, and his *ministers* alone in their official capacity. John xx. 21, 23. “Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” To set aside this remark it is not sufficient to tell us with some Independents\*, “that, perhaps, this forgiving of sin was equivalent

\* See Watt’s Plain Proof, p. 171.

“ to *healing diseases*, as we know that the Apostles had the  
 “ power of healing diseases, conferred on them, and as our  
 “ Lord declares it to be a proof of authority to forgive sin  
 “ on earth :” Matth. ix. 6. The power of healing diseases  
 is never, as far as we recollect, represented in scripture as  
 equivalent to that of forgiving iniquity ; and the Apostles,  
 in exercising the former, are never said to have performed  
 the latter. Nay, even in the passage referred to, when our  
 Saviour is asserted to have *healed diseases*, this is by no means  
 pointed out as *the same* with his *forgiving sin*, but simply  
 as an *attestation of the truth* of what he said, when he de-  
 clared that he was commissioned by his heavenly Father to  
 remit sins on earth. But will it follow that because this was  
 produced as *an evidence* of the truth of his declaration that  
 he was commissioned to forgive sins, it was *equivalent* to the  
 actual dispensation of that forgiveness ? Though the miracles  
 of the conversion of water into wine, of the multiplication of  
 the loaves, of the restoration of sight and hearing to the blind  
 and deaf, and many similar works, when performed by our  
 Lord, are adduced as *evidences* that he was, what he profess-  
 ed, the only Saviour, will it follow that these miracles were  
 equivalent to this *salvation* which he came to bestow ? It  
 seems plain that the power of remitting and retaining sins,  
 mentioned in John, is the same with what is expressed in  
 Matth. xviii. 18. and xvi. 19, by *binding* an offender, and  
*loosing* a penitent brother, agreeably to a common metaphor  
 in scripture, by which men, when, like Simon Magus, under  
 the guilt and the power of sin, are represented as fixed in a  
 bond ; and when delivered from these, as loosed or set free\*.  
 Now, this binding or loosing certainly does not mean the  
 performance of a miracle for the *cure of the body* of a peni-  
 tent brother, or a refusal to exert that power upon one who  
 is obstinate, or *the infliction of disease* upon one who has  
 transgressed ; for, in that case, it would follow from Matth.  
 xviii. that the impenitent brother, whose case we are called  
 to tell to the church, must be one who is already *diseased*,  
 or upon whom, if he obstinately persist in his sin, *disease* is  
 to be inflicted, and then too, since this miraculous power has  
 ceased, the power of jurisdiction, or of binding and loosing,

† See also Prov. v. 22, “ His own iniquities shall take the wicked  
 himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins,”  
 &c.



must have *ceased along with it*. But as none of these consequences can safely be admitted, it seems manifest that the remitting and retaining of sins mentioned in John, and the binding and loosing spoken of in Matthew, must denote the exercise only of an ordinary, and not of a miraculous power. And farther, as it appears to denote not an extraordinary but an ordinary power, consisting in that subordinate judicial authority to pardon or condemn, which those only who have the keys of the kingdom committed to them are authorized to exercise, it is equally evident, that it can be vested in the ministers only, not in the private members of the church. It is never said to be intrusted to the latter, though it is expressly affirmed (John xx.) to be given to the former; and in receiving this authority they are plainly pointed out under the character of stewards, which is altogether inconsistent with the supposition that the keys are committed to the members at large, or that they are associated with their pastors in administering the affairs of the church of Christ.

To invalidate the argument for the right of the elders exclusively to govern in the Christian church, which is derived from this passage, many other criticisms have been advanced by Independents. Some have supposed that by the keys of the kingdom which were given to Peter, we are to understand only the key of knowledge, and the honour of first preaching the truths of the gospel to the Jews and Gentiles.

In support of this they inform us, that there is an evident allusion to the custom of the Jews, who delivered to their Rabbis a key, when invested with that dignity. This, however, is very far from amounting to the binding and loosing the guilty on earth, as they were *bound and loosed in heaven*, which is here affirmed to be connected with these keys, and which undoubtedly must be an exercise of government. And we know that when the steward of the house of David, whose kingdom was certainly a type of that of Christ, had a key delivered to him, it implied his being intrusted, under the king, with the affairs of the kingdom. “It shall come to pass in that day,” says Isaiah (chap. xxii. 20), “that I will call my servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah; and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit *thy government into his hand*, (that of Shebna, who was over the house, ver. 15). And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder: he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and

“none shall open.” And we see likewise the same emblem when applied to our Lord, (who tells us, that he sent his Apostles *as* his Father had sent him, and gave them of the glory which his Father had given him), employed to denote authority. “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia,” says John, (Rev. iii. 7), “write, These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth.” Now, as in these other circumstances, it incontestably includes the power of government, whatever other idea it may suggest; and as in the passage before us, it is represented as exercised also in relation to a *kingdom*, and is connected with the other expressive phrases before specified; ought it not likewise to be so understood in the present instance?

Accordingly, one of our most respectable English Independents, in his illustration of various passages of scripture from Oriental customs, gives the same interpretation of this allusion. “As stewards of a great family,” says he, “especially of the royal household, bore a key, probably a golden one, in token of their office, the phrase of giving a person the key, naturally grew into an expression of raising him to great power, (compare Isaiah xxii. 22, with Rev. iii. 7). This was with peculiar propriety applicable to the stewards of the mysteries of God: 1 Cor. iv. 1. Peter’s opening the kingdom of heaven, as being the first that preached it both to the Jews and to the Gentiles, may be considered as an illustration of this promise; but it is more fully explained, by the power of binding and loosing afterwards mentioned\*.” As to the distinction of the keys into those of knowledge, of liberty, and of authority, by which other Independents endeavour to evade this argument, it is altogether fanciful, and not authorized by the word of God. See the London Ministers’ Divine Right of Presbytery, last edition, p. 98, 99.

Selden and Lightfoot, with some moderns, understand by the binding and loosing, a power merely of declaring the doctrines and laws of the gospel, and not of punishing or absolving in a judicial capacity, (see M<sup>r</sup> Knight on the place); and tell us, that these terms were used by the Rabbis, to signify the *lawfulness* or *unlawfulness* of things. Binding,

\* Burder’s Oriental Customs, Matth. xvi. 19.

according to them, denoted that a thing was bound up, or forbidden to men; and loosing, that it was free, or permitted—and why not so here? To this, however, it may be replied, that Independents themselves, *in general*, do not allow to their members the power of binding and loosing in *this* sense; for it is not the privilege of the members, as such, to preach the laws and doctrines of the gospel. We know, besides, that the phrases of binding and loosing were very commonly employed by the Jewish Doctors, to signify not only a *doctrinal* declaration of what was lawful or unlawful, but a *judicial* punishing or absolving of the excommunicated\*. The Greeks also had a similar expression relating to judicial authority. Thus Stephens quotes from Æschines these words, *Επιδαν τη πωλη ψηφω μη ΛΥΘΗ το παρανομον*; *i. e.* “as the person accused was not acquitted,” or, agreeably to the translation of the word in Matthew, “was not *loosed* by the first vote.” So also, when it is said of Jerusalem, (Isaiah xl. 2), that “her iniquity is “pardoned,” (a case exactly in point to Matth. xviii. 18, where the binding and loosing relate to an *offence*), the Septuagint renders the words *ΛΕΛΥΤΑΙ* αὐτῆς ἡ ἁμαρτία, “her iniquity is *loosed*†.” The Latins, in like manner, employed the same terms, to express acquittal or condemnation by judges in the civil courts, as will be evident to any one who consults the writings of Cicero, whose common phrase for acquittal is “*solvere crimine*, to loose from a crime or accusation.” In short, not only do the terms binding and loosing signify, in sacred and profane authors, judicially to punish, and pardon, and acquit, but it seems evident that in this sense they ought to be understood in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew. There, as was remarked, it is an *offence* that is said to be bound or loosed; and lest the brother who commits it should be disposed to disregard the church when they exert this power, it is declared that what is thus done on earth according to the will of the Saviour,

\* See Buxtorf's Lexicon, Chald. Talmud. Rabbin. p. 1410.

† Thus, likewise (Ecclesiasticus xxviii. 2), says the son of Sirach, who was a Jew, “Forgive thy neighbour the hurt that he hath done thee, so shall thy sins be forgiven thee also when thou prayest;” literally, “shall be loosed to thee,” *λυθησονται*. And thus, too, the Septuagint, speaking of God's forgiving the sin of Job's friends, (Job xlii. 9), says, that he *loosed* their sin, *Ελυσε την ἁμαρτιαν αὐτοῖς*.

shall be done in heaven also. But this binding or loosing of an *offence*, surely, cannot so properly mean, the declaring it to be or not to be an offence, or denouncing the judgments annexed to it (though this may be included), as, agreeably to the common acceptation of the phrase, the pronouncing the pardon, or the punishment—the acquittal, or the guilt of the offender. Besides, this binding or loosing cannot apply to the preaching of the gospel, or the declaration of its laws; for it is a sentence in which two or three at least must be agreed—which is to be employed only after a private remonstrance and admonition, before two or three Christian brethren, has been tried without effect; and—which must be justified by the testimony of witnesses who have heard the offender vindicate his offence, before it is to be pronounced by the church. It is difficult, however, to perceive on what principle it could be necessary *to call witnesses* before the gospel was preached, or the laws of its kingdom were announced; though this was absolutely essential, if an *act of judicial power* was to be exercised. To this *power* all the circumstances mentioned in the passage easily apply: we therefore conclude, that it sanctions the exercise of judicial authority.

Nor let it be objected with M<sup>r</sup> Knight, that these expressions are not susceptible of this meaning, because it is not said, *whomsoever*, but *whatsoever* ye shall bind or loose; for it has been already shewn, that they are applied in the Old Testament not only to persons but to things, where it is certain that punishing, or pardoning, was intended. Thus, when it is said of Jerusalem (Isaiah xlii. 2.), that her *iniquity* was to be *loosed*—of Job's friends, (Job xlii. 9), that their *sins* were *loosed* to them—and of those who forgive their neighbours, (Eccles. xxviii. 2), that their *sins* should be *loosed*—*things* only are spoken of; and it is not merely a declaration that they were lawful or unlawful, but a judicial release from the punishment of transgression.

From this induction it would therefore appear, that the binding and loosing mentioned, represent the exercise of authoritative judicial power; and, of consequence, that as this power has already been proved to be committed, together with the keys of the kingdom, to the ministers, and not to the members, the former, as distinguished from the latter, are the only persons entitled to the exercise of this authority.

## LETTER V.

SIR,

As it appears that the various titles characteristic of rulers are given to the elders exclusively, so *the highest acts of government and discipline* seem to be represented in scripture as performed by them, and by them alone. This I shall now endeavour to prove, and then conclude this part of the discussion,

Of the various acts which ought to be considered as of the greatest importance in ecclesiastical government, the first, unquestionably, which merits our attention, is that of the *admission of members*.

It seems manifest from the sacred oracles, that this work is committed exclusively to the pastors of the church, and not to them merely as conjoined with the members. At the effusion on Pentecost, for instance, we are told, that in what remained of *a single day*, after a sermon from the Apostles, about *three thousand* souls were added to the church. But how was it possible that in so short a space the members at large could meet with the pastors, and hear them examined, and express in order their approbation or disapprobation of the confession and character of every individual in such a multitude? When Philip went down to Samaria, and baptized many, both men and women, and when he baptized and received the Ethiopian eunuch as a member of the church, as well as when Ananias baptized Paul, though in the city of Damascus where there was a Christian church, it is plain that this act was performed solely by ministers, without convening or consulting members. While, however, in these and other instances, both where a church was forming, and, as in the example at Jerusalem, where it was already formed, the power of admission is represented as committed to the ministers alone, as far as we recollect there is not a single instance in the whole of the New Testament, where persons were received into the fellowship of the church after the judgment of members had been asked and obtained. It is indeed said, (Acts ix. 26), that “when Saul, after his conversion, came up to Jerusalem, and assayed to join himself to the disciples, they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.” But here there is no



intimation of any meeting of the members together with the pastors, to consider the propriety of receiving him as a disciple. All that is stated is simply this—that all of them, both Apostles and members, were afraid that he was not, as he professed, a disciple in reality, but intended to deceive them; and consequently, that as so general a fear of him was entertained by the church, he could not be received *by those* whose prerogative it was to admit him. Accordingly, we are informed that when he was at last received, it was in consequence of his “being taken and introduced by Barnabas *to the Apostles,*” and of *their* being satisfied with the account of his conversion and sincerity which was delivered to them by that Christian minister, ver. 27.

Is it objected, that though it may be proved from these examples that ministers may *baptize* without consulting the church, they cannot admit to any other ordinance, or communicate to applicants the *full* privileges of members, without soliciting and obtaining their approbation? I answer by demanding in the first place, whether *all* Independents allow their pastors to receive adults to baptism without consulting their churches? whether, in the next place, it can be proved from the word of God that *adults*, when baptised, are not entitled to every other Christian privilege? and whether the three thousand who were baptised at Pentecost are not declared to have been added to the Church as members, (Acts ii, 41), while it is evident that there was not sufficient time for calling the members, and interrogating in their presence each of these converts, and requesting their judgment on the propriety of admitting them? Is it contended, that this scheme is adverse to the principle of Christian liberty, as it enables the pastors to impose whom they please on the communion of the church? It is replied, that it is unjust to affirm that any pastor of a Presbyterian church is warranted by Presbytery to exercise such a power. Certain qualifications are required in the standards of his church before any person can be received into fellowship, and till he obtains satisfactory evidence that those who apply to him have these qualifications, he cannot lawfully receive them\*.

\* Since writing the above, I have looked into Pardovan, book ii. title iv. sect. iv. and find, that by *the constitution* of Presbyterian churches, no minister, though he may examine, can admit any person to the privilege of membership, till the whole of his Session, as well as ~~himself~~ himself, are satisfied both as to his knowledge and piety.

If, through mistake, an improper person be occasionally admitted, the members are permitted to communicate what they know of the applicant to the pastors; and if, after remonstrance, he be continued in communion, the lowest individual in the congregation is allowed to call these pastors to an account, with the whole of their Session, before a superior court; and if that court should decide amiss, to summon even *it*, with these pastors and elders, to a still higher tribunal; and even *that* to a higher, till the obnoxious member be at last excluded. Among Independents however, with all their boasted liberty and purity of principle, this is impossible: for if an unworthy applicant be received as a member by a majority of any of their churches, there is no superior court, on earth at least, before whom a conscientious minority can arraign them, and procure the expulsion of that member from their society; however unfit, he must continue in fellowship, while no alternative is left to them but immediate separation, or patient submission amidst obvious corruption. Nor will their separation terminate here; for if the same inconsistency shall be manifested by the majority of the other congregation to whom they may attach themselves, from their want of any court superior to that congregation, they must again separate and join a third, and so on, in a continued course of change and separation, till, like some individuals of them, they be excluded from the fellowship of every church upon earth. In fine, if Independents object to the principles of Presbyterians because their members must confide, as to the character of an applicant, in the word of the pastor, on what principle do they themselves trust, in the account which is given of him by any of their members when the majority are ignorant of him? May not the pastors and elders obtain in private, all the information which is furnished to the majority by these members in public; and if that majority are disposed to give credit to the latter in an Independent church, why should not the congregation give credit to their pastors in a Presbyterian? Besides, if the members of a Presbyterian congregation are not allowed to state their sentiments and vote before an applicant is received, it is because the scriptures seem to vest that power solely in the pastors. And it certainly appears more consistent with that *tenderness* and *justice* which are due to such applicants, that their qualifications should be examined *in private* by the ministers of

the church, and that all necessary inquiries should be made concerning them by him and by the elders, than that every particular the most delicate and important, respecting their character, should be laid open at large to the scrutiny and review of a *whole congregation*; or that they should wait till *each* of the members be personally satisfied respecting them. It would thus seem that the pastors alone, without soliciting the judgment of the members, are authorised by scripture to perform this part of ecclesiastical government, and that this constitution is also better fitted than that of Independency to promote the ends of Christian edification\*.

Next to the power of admitting members to religious fellowship, and superior to it undoubtedly in point of magnitude, is that of ordaining office-bearers to the exercise of their function. This power likewise appears to belong exclusively to the pastors of the church, and neither solely nor conjointly to the Christian people.

Many, indeed, of the modern Independents in England maintain, that ordination should not now be performed before a person is appointed to the charge of the congregation; that the imposition of hands was used only for the communication of miraculous gifts; and that the pastoral relation is formed simply by the invitation of the people. Some of them, who invite ministers to a settlement, expressly discard the idea of ordination, and say it is only a meeting for prayer and exhortation. And Dr. Priestley, one of the most zealous of modern Independents, to prevent the people from forming any other opinion of it, recommended that before this settlement actually takes place, the young minister should dispense the sacraments to the church.

To affirm, however, that ordination is now unnecessary, and that an invitation from the people is all that is requisite

\* It might also have been added, that were it judged expedient, even upon the Presbyterian system, when any person applies for the privilege of membership, it could be announced to the congregation, and any member who could substantiate any objections to his admission, as in the case of election to the office of elders, be invited to state them to the minister or session. And it is known to be consistent with our Presbyterian constitution, that the first time a person receives a token for admission to the supper, it may be delivered to him in the presence of the whole congregation, so that being solemnly pointed out to those of the members at large, who choose to attend, as a fellow-member, they may recognize him in that light, and treat him as such.

to form a pastoral relation, and to constitute him whom they elect a regular pastor, seems to be contrary at once to reason and to scripture. Simple election may declare the qualification of a person who is approved of by the electors, for discharging the duties of his office, but it cannot by itself invest him with that office. When Moses said to the Israelites, (Deut. i. 13), "Take ye wise men and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I *will* make them rulers over you," he plainly intimates, that the choice of the people was not sufficient of itself to constitute those whom they elected rulers, unless accompanied by an official appointment from himself. Deacons also, when first appointed in the Christian church, after being elected by the people, (Acts vi. 3), were solemnly ordained with prayer, and the imposition of hands, by the Apostles. But if this was necessary in an office so inferior as that of the deacon, even after the election of the people, much more must it be requisite in an office so superior as that of the pastor. We are informed also, that Paul, together with Barnabas, (Acts xiv. 23), notwithstanding the choice of the people (if such a choice was exercised), *ordained* elders in every church, in Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch; that Titus, (Tit. i. 5), was left in Crete, "to *ordain* elders," though chosen by the churches, "in every city, as Paul had appointed him;" that this Apostle enjoined Timothy, (1 Tim. v. 22), "to lay hands suddenly upon no man," i. e. not to ordain him rashly. which appears unaccountable, if popular election alone had been sufficient to make the object of it a pastor. If the choice of the people, moreover, constitutes a person the pastor of an Independent congregation, it seems necessarily to follow, that since no act performed by one Independent church is binding on another, if the congregation which chose him withdraw from his ministry, or oblige him to leave them, his ministry must cease with it, and he must again be reduced to the station of a private member. Besides, though the observance of the imposition of hands was occasionally employed as an emblem of the communication of miraculous powers, it cannot be demonstrated that this was its *uniform* use, or that, from its being the medium *at times* of the communication of these powers, it should now be discontinued. Prayer too, we know, (Acts viii. 14—17, and ix. 40, &c.), was occasionally a mean of imparting these powers; but would any Independent presume, from this

circumstance, to argue, as some do respecting the imposition of hands, that prayer should now be discontinued in the church? This usage then, when employed in *ordination*, was intended merely as an emblem of the supplications of those who were engaged in performing it, that all necessary, *common* and *ordinary* endowments might be bestowed on the person on whom they laid their hands.

This *laying on of hands* is mentioned by Paul, (Heb. vi. 2), as one of the *first principles* of the doctrine of Christ. This, surely, cannot denote a communication of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, for all the other articles of Christian faith which he specifies as *primary* or *fundamental*, do not relate to what was peculiar to the *primitive* church, but are of equal importance to *every* age. It appears difficult also to conceive how *this* particular miracle should have been of such uncommon moment as to merit being considered in this interesting light, and that the knowledge and belief of it, whatever other information a person might possess, was essential to his being received as a member. By the imposition of hands then, as Amesius observes in his refutation of Belsermine, (tom. ii. p. 76), seems unquestionably to be designed the Christian ministry, of the communication of which this observance was a sign. In confirmation of this, as well as in refutation of the sentiments of Episcopalians and Papists, nothing appears more just than the words of Cartwright, in his Treatise against the Rhemists. “By imposition of hands the Apostle meaneth no sacrament, much less confirmation after baptism; but by a trope and borrowed speech the ministry of the church, upon the which hands were *laid*, which appeareth in that whosoever believeth that there ought not to be a ministry in order to teach, and govern the church, overthroweth Christianity; whereas if confirmation of children were a sacrament, as it is not, yet a man holding the rest, and denying the use of it, might notwithstanding be saved.”

We perceive likewise, that Timothy is commanded by Paul, (1 Tim. iv. 14), “not to *neglect* the gift which was in him, and which was given him by or according to prophecy\*, with the laying on of the hands of the Presby-

\* It would seem that certain predictions had been delivered concerning Timothy, that he would be an eminent and useful minister; in consequence of which it is here declared, that in the usual way he had been set apart to that office.



"tery." But if the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery on Timothy had imparted to him any miraculous gift of the Spirit, how could he have *neglected* diligently to exercise it, since being entirely under the guidance of his extraordinary influence, and directed by his supernatural irresistible energy, he could not have withstood this instinctive impulse to employ those endowments which he had received, *whenever* and *wherever* the Spirit suggested. And if the imposition of hands, when used even in ordaining an Evangelist to his office, does not appear in the present instance to have been the sign of the communication of miraculous gifts, may it not be the emblem of the communication only of common gifts also to ordinary ministers? In fine, this same Apostle, in this Epistle, (chap. v. ver. 22), enjoins this Evangelist "to lay hands suddenly upon no man." But if the gifts which were to be conferred, in the ordination referred to, were altogether extraordinary, how could this injunction have been delivered? Could Timothy, when under the *miraculous* guidance of the Spirit, impart *precipitately* his *supernatural* gifts to those who were unfit or unworthy to receive them? or could he err, as to the proper persons who should obtain them? The supposition is certainly inadmissible. From this reasoning we may therefore conclude, that simple *election*, without *ordination*, cannot constitute a man a Christian minister, and that the imposition of hands, employed in ordination, was not an emblem of the communication of miraculous gifts, but of ordinary endowments; and of course, that it, as well as ordination, must be a standing ordinance in the church of God?

But granting that ordination should still be observed, who are the persons that are authorised to perform it? Is it the *people alone*, or in conjunction with the elders? or is it those only who are ministers? That it is committed to the latter alone, appears to be the general opinion of *your* churches, for *ministers* alone, as far as I know, ordain your pastors. That such also is the determination of scripture, appears evident from a very cursory perusal of the sacred volume. Not only is it obvious that the majority of the people are totally *unfit* to examine the qualifications of a man for the important and arduous work of the ministry, and consequently that it would be dangerous to intrust them with such power; and not only is it ridiculous to imagine that those who can neither preach nor dispense the sacraments,

can impart an office while they have *none* themselves, but it is never affirmed in any part of scripture, that the people are to ordain. On the contrary, we are informed, that when the first deacons were chosen by the disciples, they were ordained by the Apostles, (Acts vi.)—that when Timothy was invested with the office of a minister, it was by the laying on of the hands of the eldership or presbytery, of which Paul was a member, (compare 1 Tim. iv. 14, with 2 Tim. i. 6),—that “when faithful men, “and men who were “found able to teach others also,” were invested with the ministry in the places where he was labouring, it was to be committed to them by him and his fellow-elders, (2 Tim. ii. 2),—that when hands, as was before said, were to be laid upon any, to set them apart to this office, it was he alone, and his fellow-ministers, who were required to do it, (1 Tim. v. 22),—and that when elders were to be ordained in every city in Crete, it was only Titus, and his fellow-ministers, who were to devote them to their work. Is it not wonderful; however, that if it be the prerogative of the *people*, either *with* elders or *without* them, to ordain others to the work of the ministry, not a syllable should be mentioned of their being invested with this trust, or exercising this power, and that it should be represented uniformly as committed to the ministers?

Robinson, indeed, with some ancient English and American Independents, and Lockier, one of the ancient, with some of our modern Scotch Independents, have not scrupled to maintain that Matthias, who was chosen in place of Judas, was ordained by the hundred and twenty disciples, who were partly composed of the eleven apostles, partly of the seventy disciples, and partly of the private members of the church. All who were present could not, however, be admitted to ordain Matthias, for among these “were the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus;” and it has never yet been alledged by any Independent, as far as I have heard, that *women* are to be allowed the honour of ordaining a minister. It is evident also, that no account is given of his ordination, but simply of his *election*, and there is nothing very decided to lead us to suppose that he was even chosen by lot by any but the Apostles. “Wherefore of “these men,” says Peter, “that have companied with us, “(the Apostles), all the time that the Lord Jesus went in

“and out among us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us (undoubtedly the Apostles) of his resurrection.” Besides, it merits our particular notice, that there was not properly even an *election*, either by the apostles or the people. Two men were named as fit for the apostleship; and *the Lord himself*, in a supernatural manner, as they drew out the lots, pointed out to them the individual. The word *συνκαταριθμησθαι*, (ver. 26), which is rendered by our translators, “he was numbered” with the Apostles, and by the Vulgate, “annumeratus est cum undecim Apostolis,” does not intimate that he was ordained by the people, as Lockier contended; but as the learned Mr. Caudrey, in his *Vindiciæ Clavium*, p. 29, says, “That seeing God had chosen and ordained him, they accepted him by *orderly subjection* to the revealed will of Christ.” Accordingly, we find the verb *ἀριθμῶ*, of which this is a compound, in Luke xiv. 28, signifying to count or reckon the cost of a thing; and in Rev. xiii. 18, it is employed to denote the counting of the number of the beast; from which it would seem, that *συνκαταριθμησθαι* is properly rendered by our translators, “and he was numbered,” not ordained, with the Apostles; and simply means that he was henceforth counted or reckoned by the church as one of them.

It is argued farther, that the people must be admitted along with the pastors to ordain ministers, because when it is said of Paul and Barnabas, (Acts xiv. 23), that “they ordained elders in every city,” the word *χειροτονήσαντες*, in their opinion, properly signifies that they chose them by suffrage or vote; and as there were only two of them, they think that they could not themselves choose them, but simply presided at an election of them by the people. But on this it may be remarked, that if their translation were adopted, it would only shew that the people *elected*, but not that they *ordained* the elders, two things which are extremely different; for, in any of your congregations, for example, though the members elect, it is the ministers of other churches alone who ordain a pastor. Besides, though the word, as applied to the customs of ancient Greece, literally signifies the election by suffrage, expressed by lifting up the hand of the elector, it never denotes to *preside* at an election. We know, too, that it means often to constitute or appoint to an office *without suffrage* or vote. Thus Josephus, in his *Antiquities*, book vi. chap. iv, speaks of “a

“ a king appointed by God, βασιλεὺς ὑπο τοῦ Θεοῦ χειροτονηθεὶς ;” and thus, too, Acts x. 40, 41, “ Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, προχειροτονημένοις. Since, then, it must be plain to every person who looks for a moment at the grammatical arrangement of Acts xiv, 23, that it was Paul and Barnabas who did what is expressed by χειροτονησαντες, in ver. 23, as much as it was they who, according to ver. 22, confirmed the souls of the disciples, and exhorted them to continue in the faith ; since this word *never* signifies, as far as has been yet ascertained, to *preside* at an election, where the choice is made by those who vote by lifting up the hand ; since it means to *constitute* or *ordain*, as well as to *elect* ; since it is never taken in the latter sense, but where it is used to express the act of at least more than two ; and since there were only two, in the present instance, who did what is intended by it ; it appears naturally to follow that it cannot denote in the place in question, that the Apostles themselves elected elders by vote in every city, and much less that they presided at the election of them by others, but simply, as our venerable translators have rendered it, that they themselves “ ordained them.” And with this idea the version of the Vulgate or Old Latin, which formerly was so generally received by the churches, accurately coincides : “ Et cum constituissent illis per singulas ecclesias presbyteros ;” i. e. “ And when they had *constituted* or *ordained* elders to “ them in every church.” But what argument can be deduced from this, for admitting the people to join with their pastors in ordaining ministers \* ?

\* It is objected farther by them, that the Presbytery who ordained Timothy to the office of an Evangelist could not be ordinary pastors, because they were greatly inferior to him, but Apostles or Prophets ; and of course, that no argument can be drawn from his ordination by such a Presbytery, for the exclusive right of our present ministers to ordain. To this it is replied, that if, according to the spirit of this objection, only superior ministers could ordain Timothy, how can it be argued that the *people*, who are greatly inferior to a minister, can ordain a *minister* ?—that even though it were granted that the Presbytery which ordained Timothy was composed of extraordinary ministers, they did not act as such, but merely in the ordinary capacity of elders, as the word presbytery or eldership suggests—and that for any thing that we know, there may have been among them ordinary ministers, who might have been admitted with as much propriety, as they were already ministers, to ordain an Evangelist, as teachers, who certainly were

Thus, then, it would seem that we have no authority from scripture for allowing the people to ordain pastors, and that it is the ministers of the gospel, and they alone, who are warranted by the word of God, as well as by the explicit declaration of *your* churches, to perform this important act of ecclesiastical government.

Farther, while it is undeniable that the power of *exercising discipline* is committed to those who are office-bearers of the church, it does not appear that it is vested also indiscriminately in all who are members.

That the power of discipline is conferred upon the office-bearers must be evident to us, on reading with impartiality the following passages. "Then said Jesus to them again, (the eleven Apostles), Peace be unto you: as my father hath sent me, even so send I you. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained:" John xx. 21, 23. "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses:" 1 Tim. v. 19. And that it is ministers alone who are to receive this accusation, and examine these witnesses, seems manifest from this, that it is they alone who are to do it that are commanded in the next verse, "to rebuke before all such as sinned, that others might fear," by whom we are certainly to understand the ministers. And again, says Paul to Titus, (chap. iii. 10), "A man that is an heretic, after a first and second admonition, reject." While such however are the repeated declarations of scripture respecting the commission of this power to the ministers, not a single instance has yet been produced where it is *explicitly* affirmed to be intrusted with the people. Passages have indeed been induced by independents, from the eighteenth of Matthew, and the First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, to demonstrate that this power has been vested also in the people. But we trust it will appear from the following Letters, that it cannot be proved from either of these passages, that the people *personally* are to exercise this power; and that, agreeably to our common modes of speaking, all that is there affirmed to be done by them, may be done by them solely by means of their representatives. On the contrary, however, while not a single instance

but ordinary ministers, were allowed with prophets, (Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3), to set apart, by prayer and imposition of hands, Paul and Barnabas, one of whom was an Apostle and the other an Evangelist, to a particular work in the city of Antioch.



has yet been brought forward, where the members of the church, as *distinguished* from the ministers, or as *joined* to them, or intrusted with this power, the office-bearers, who are elsewhere characterised as governors, without the addition of any other person, are commanded to exercise it. Since the *elders* of the church, then, are the only persons who are expressly declared to be vested with this power; since the members, as *distinguished* from the elders, are never said to have received this authority, nor to be *joined* with them as ecclesiastical overseers in such a manner as that their vote must be asked before it can be exerted; and since all that is said to be done by the members could be done by them simply through their elders or representatives, without expressing any judgment or vote of their own; it appears to be a fair and natural conclusion, that the elders of the church, without the members, are to decide in matters of discipline as well as government.

But if the elders alone, as was now evinced, are to admit members, ordain office bearers, and exercise discipline, it necessarily follows that it is they alone, in every thing, who are to govern the church. The former confessedly are more important matters, and if intrusted exclusively with the management of these, why should they not exclusively be invested also with the administration of what is inferior? Besides, as was remarked, is it not asserted by Mr. Ewing, that the members are not to judge in inferior points, from the baneful consequences which, in his opinion, would result from it to the cause of truth; and of course, since they are not to determine in more interesting matters, is it not evident that they are not to judge at all?

Upon a review then of this as well as the preceding arguments, I feel disposed to conclude that the elders alone, and not the people, are to govern the church, and that the former are to administer it without even soliciting the consent of the latter; and this conclusion I am authorised to consider as unavoidable, unless it can be proved that the arguments which have been urged for this Presbyterian principle are *equally explicable* upon the Independent plan, and are contradicted by *superior unexceptionable proof*. In the following Letters it is proposed to consider these proofs in order, which have been urged for Independency, with the degree of force which they seem to possess, to *counterbalance* and overpower the different arguments which appear to be presented by the sacred writings in favour of Presbytery.

## LETTER VI.

SIR,

THAT the people are entitled, in matters which relate to ecclesiastical polity, to judge and vote as well as their elders, you think to be evident from Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17. "Where our Lord," you say, (p. 33), "gives his people particular directions respecting their conduct in the case of offences. *Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* Here, by the church to whom the offence of a brother is to be told, you think is intended a particular congregation, and every member in it; and in proof of it, remark, that in the scriptures the word *church* has two significations. It either denotes the whole assembly of those redeemed by the blood of Christ, or an individual society. In this last sense, it is sometimes applied to a meeting of any description. It is thus used, Acts xix. 32, where the word generally translated church, is rendered assembly. When in this last and more restricted sense it is applied to Christians, it is plainly descriptive of those who meet together for Christian fellowship in an individual society. Agreeably to this, it is deserving of remark, that when the Christians scattered over a province are mentioned, who, of course, met in different societies, the word *church* is always found in the plural. Thus we have the churches of Judea, the churches of Macedonia, the churches of Galatia, &c. Examples of the first use of the term occur, Col. i. 18. Eph. i. 22. Heb. xii. 23; and of the second, Acts ix. 31. xiv. 23. 1 Cor. xiv. 23. In no case does it seem employed to denote the rulers of a church as distinguished from the general body, though in Acts xv. 22, it is used to describe the latter of these as distinguished from the former. As in the passage, then,

“ above quoted, it would be impossible to comply with the  
 “ admonition, if by the word church, the *church universal*  
 “ is meant, it is plain, the expression cannot be understood  
 “ in any other sense, than as denoting the particular society  
 “ of Christians with which we are connected. To these  
 “ the offence is to be told. If the offending brother will  
 “ not hear them, he is to be viewed as a heathen man and a  
 “ publican, in the same light as those who are in a state  
 “ of heathenism, and not members of the church at all: in  
 “ other words, he is to be excluded from the society. In  
 “ this passage, nothing seems plainer, than that the decision  
 “ of the church is to be considered as final. There is  
 “ not the smallest hint about the possibility of an appeal;  
 “ nay, we may safely assert, that with such a system as a  
 “ court of review, by which the decision of an individual  
 “ society may be reversed, the language is altogether in-  
 “ compatible.”

In answer to this, however, I would shortly observe,  
 that it seems by no means just to affirm, that the *church* in  
 scripture signifies either the church universal, or a particu-  
 lar congregation. It is applied in scripture, for instance,  
 to the church at Jerusalem, many years after the gospel had  
 been preached there, and preached even by eleven apostles,  
 and many prophets and evangelists, as well as pastors and  
 teachers, with wonderful success. Now, when bestowed  
 upon this church, Presbyterians have asserted, and the  
 church, which you have left, endeavours to prove, in her  
 public standards, that it undoubtedly includes a *number* of  
 congregations united in such a manner, in point of govern-  
 ment, as that while they still remained *separate* congrega-  
 tions, and furnished sufficient employment even for all these  
 ministers, they constituted only *one church*. But to attempt  
 to disprove this, and overthrow the argument adduced from  
 it by her, for the subordination of a number of congrega-  
 tions to the review of a Presbytery, as well as to their own  
 particular rulers, by a simple assertion, that the *word is not*  
*so to be understood*, appears to me not ingenuous. It is  
 plainly what has been denominated by logicians a *begging*  
*the question*, or taking for granted the very thing to be  
 proved, which species of proof, however easy and expen-  
 ditious, is unquestionably unfair, and was scarcely to be ex-  
 pected from you, who had engaged to put your readers in  
 possession of the principal arguments on both sides of the

question. Not only, however, does the word church, in these and other passages, signify a number of congregations united in such a manner as to have one common government, while at the same time they had each their particular rulers; but it appears even sometimes to mean the office-bearers of the church as distinguished from the members. In this sense it seems to be taken in Acts viii. 1, where we are told, that “there was a great persecution on the same “day (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ) against the church which was at “Jerusalem; and that they were *all* scattered abroad about “the regions of Judea and Samaria, *except the Apostles*.” Now, that by the church here specified, who were *all* scattered abroad except the Apostles, is intended only the ministers, and not the members, appears to be most probable, not only from this, that the ministers would be more readily marked out as the first objects of their vengeance by the enemies of Christianity\*, and that all those who are mentioned of them who were scattered abroad, as Philip, (ver. 5), and Simeon, and Lucius, and Manaen, (chap. xiii. 1), were of this description; but that even after it is affirmed here, that *all the* church were scattered abroad *except the Apostles*, it is asserted in the third verse, that a *church still remained* different from the former, and a church which Saul persecuted, and the men and women of which, entering into their houses, he committed to prison. But if *the whole* of the church referred to in ver. 1, as we are informed, were scattered abroad *except the Apostles*; and if at the same time it be instantly subjoined, that there was *still* a church after this at Jerusalem, of which those alone are mentioned

\* That the Apostles at this time did not flee from Jerusalem is indeed remarkable. “Perhaps,” as a judicious author observes, “the Jewish rulers, finding that neither threats, nor any punishment which they could inflict, could deter them from their duty, were unwilling to exhibit a new proof of the weakness of their power. Perhaps, as they continued in a more public part of the city, where multitudes attended, their enemies were afraid of exciting a tumult by attacking them. Or, perhaps, Saul spared them from respect to the opinion of his master Gamaliel.” Or, as might have been added, as they in particular were appointed to be witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, they might see it to be their duty to remain in that city where he had risen from the dead, to bear testimony there for a while to this fact, even though it should expose them to suffering. See Robertson’s Lay-preaching Indefensible, p. 38.

who were not ministers; is it not obvious, that, in the former verse, the church who are spoken of, and are declared to have been *all* scattered abroad except the Apostles, can have been the *ministers* only of that Christian church? Here, then, is one instance, in which it would seem, that by the church we are certainly to understand its office-bearers as distinguished from its members; and this application of the term appears no less defensible upon the principle of substituting a part for the whole, than the application of it to the members exclusively of the ministers in Acts xv. 22, agreeably to the view which you give of that passage.

Since, then, this term is applied to the office-bearers, in distinction from the members, as well as to the members, when distinguished from the office-bearers, or, as in other cases, when conjoined with them, in which of the senses is it to be understood in this passage, when a Christian is commanded to tell the offence of his brother to the church? That it has been admitted to refer to the first of these by some of the most respectable even of the *Independents themselves*, is a fact which is incontrovertible. The famous Mr. Parker of New England, in his Tract. de Polit. lib. iii. cap. xv. allows explicitly that the first time it is mentioned in Matth. xviii. 17, it means *the elders*, and *they alone*, though in the following clause, however inconsistently, he supposes it denotes the people as concurring with them. His words are, “*Ecclesiam primo loco consideratam in his*”  
 “*verbis, præcise partem aristocraticam, id est presbyterium, significare existimamus;*” *i. e.* “*We think that the*”  
 “*church, in these first clauses, signifies expressly the aristocratic part, or the elders.*” And that it has been considered, or at least acted upon, by others of them in the same light is no less certain. The celebrated Hooker of America, in his Survey, part iii. chap. iii. p. 36, affirms, that in a case of offence, the matter is first to be told to *the elders*; that it is their prerogative to examine whether the point is of sufficient magnitude as to be made a subject of judicial authoritative investigation. to call witnesses, to review the evidence, and consider the sentence which is proportioned to the offence, before the matter is to be laid before the members. And such, also, at least is the *practice* of many of the present bodies of Independents, whose elders are the persons to whom, if the offending brother refuses to yield, when admonished of his fault before two or three



witnesses, the offence is told, and who make a particular inquiry into the business before it is announced to the congregation. Such, too, if I am not misinformed, is the practice of your own society, and of its sister churches. But without farther detailing the sentiments of Independents, the *practice* at least of many of whom, with regard to the persons to whom the offence is to be told, after the private admonition, is the same with that of Presbyterians, I proceed to observe, that it is equally natural, and much more consistent, to understand by the church, in the passage before us, the elders of the congregation, than the congregation at large connected with the office-bearers.

In the 1st place, It seems plain, that in what our Lord here says, as to the mode of procedure in the Christian church, he alludes to the Jewish ecclesiastical courts, the synagogue and the sanhedrin, which at that time were familiar to the minds of the Jews, and from which most probably they would form their ideas of the import of his words. This is not only affirmed by Calvin, Beza, Paræus, and other learned expositors, but is granted even by the venerable Goodwin, the most distinguished of the seven Independent brethren who sat in the Assembly of Divines at Westminster. "The allusion of Jesus," says he, (p. 57, 58, of his Treatise on Government), "is to the synagogues in every town, which were the ecclesiastical state. 'The books of Moses were read in every city, in the synagogues: Acts xv. 21. 'To tell the church therefore,'" he remarks, "was to tell *that particular synagogue* of which they were members;" and this he endeavours to prove by a variety of arguments. And that this was the meaning of Christ appears also from the words which are subjoined, "Let him be to thee as a *heathen man and a publican*;" which I observe, in opposition to Mr. Glass\*,

\* See his Letters to Ayton, in the first volume of his Works, p. 287, where he denies that this passage refers to the order of the Jewish church, or to excommunication from their societies; and affirms, after Prynne and some ancient Independents, that it contains merely a command to Christians to abstain from civil intercourse and from eating with an obstinate offending brother, as the Jews abstained from associating or eating with a Heathen or a Publican, referring us to 1 Cor. v. 11, compared with Acts x. 28, and xi. 3. It does not, however, appear that civil intercourse was prohibited to the Jews with the Heathens, or was avoided by them, though we know that they did not cultivate religious fellowship.

you rightly consider, (p. 34), as denoting *exclusion from the church*, and which, according to Goodwin, (p. 59), are similar in import to “casting out of the synagogue.” Ben-

On the contrary, we find that Nehemiah permitted the Tyrians to sell their commodities to the children of Israel on every day but the Sabbath, (Neh. xiii. 16.—21)—that the servants of Hiram and of Solomon were employed together in building the temple—that Jehoshaphat associated with the king of Edom, (2 Kings iii)—and that, in the reign of Solomon, there were no less than a hundred and fifty thousand and six hundred Heathens in the land of Judea, with whom the Israelites could not fail to mingle. The intercourse, then, of which Peter speaks, (Acts x. 28), as quoted by Glass, must have been a *religious* intercourse; and this seems to be evident not only from its being stated as the end for which Cornelius requested an interview, (ver. 22), that he might hear words,” or religious instructions, “from him,” but also from the translation of his words in the Syriac version, (ver. 28), “Ye know that it is unlawful for a man that is a Jew to join himself unto a man that is a “stranger, who is not a son of his generation,” *i. e.* in religious fellowship. And as it appears plain that it was only religious intercourse which was avoided with the Heathens by the Jews, so it has been asserted, and asserted with considerable plausibility, that they were not prohibited from eating every kind of food with the Gentiles, but only such as was unclean. Tostatus, upon 2 Chron. vi. and Grotius, in his book de Jure Bell. et Pac. lib. ii. cap. xv. sect. ix, expressly affirm, that it was only such meats as were prohibited by the law that the Jews were ordered not to eat with the Heathens, but that all other things they might eat with them. And Drusius, in his Quæst. et Resp. lib. ii. Quæst. lxxvii, mentions an old law, from one of the writings of the Rabbis, Elias in Thesbite, which forbade the Jews to drink *wine* with Heathens, and was made at the time when the Gentiles used prelibations of wine in their sacred rites: “Lata videlicet eo tempore quo gentes vinum libabant in sacris.” But such a prohibition, and especially for *such a reason*, proves that the Jews might eat and drink with the Gentiles all other things which were not unclean, or employed for idolatrous purposes. It is obvious then, that to represent our Saviour, in Matth. xviii, as commanding an obstinate offending brother to be treated by his church as a Heathen was treated in these respects by the Jews, who neither refused him civil intercourse, nor hesitated to eat with him whatever meats were not prohibited by the law or used by him to idolatrous purposes, is to render his words trifling and insignificant. Besides, even admitting that they refused to have any civil intercourse with a Heathen, or to eat with him at all, this was only *one part*, and the *least part* of the privileges which they denied him. He could not be a member of their synagogues, nor was he allowed to worship in the inner court of their temple. Ezek. xlv. 7, 9. Acts xxi. 28. He was viewed, in short, as “an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the

jamin of Tudela moreover, when speaking of the Massilian synagogue, thrice applies to it in one paragraph, and even to its *rulers* alone, the term *kahal*, which is most frequently rendered by the Seventy *εκκλησια*, the very word employed in this passage, and translated *church* (see Vitringa de Synagoga, p. 563, 564.) It is observed also by Goodwin, that the word *συναγωγη*, translated “synagogue,” and the word *εκκλησια*, here rendered “church,” are, in a number of instances, “all one in the Septuagint.” But we know that the first of these terms, which is often synonymous with the word here translated church, is used by James, in allusion to the Jewish synagogue, to denote either a Christian congregation, or the place where they met, transferring to the latter the name of the former; for the words of that Apostle, (see his Epistle, chap. ii. ver. 2), which are ren-

“world.” Compare Eph. ii. 11, 12. To consider the phrase therefore, “Let him be to thee as a Heathen man,” as including, on the other hand, any thing less than the privation of these privileges, is to attach to it a meaning totally below its import and significance. Whatever other privileges then might be refused to the Heathens, as they were evidently excluded by the Jews from their church; and as appears from the New Testament, and the writings of the Rabbis, that heretical, or apostate, or disobedient brethren, (see John ix. xii. 42. xvi. 2. Abarbanel de Capite Fidci, Selden de Jure Natur. et Gent. lib. vi, cap. x.), were cast by them, like Heathens, out of their synagogues—and were obliged, like them, to pay usury for the money which they received in loan, “Quia fratrum nomen exuerant;” and, as Grotius observes on Luke vi. 22, if they came into the temple, were admitted, like them, only into the outer court, and that too with a particular mark of disgrace; since such was the way in which the Gentiles, or Heathens, were usually treated by the Jews, and since such was the way in which *those of the Jews who apostatized* were treated by their church, is it not obvious that when the very *same language* is applied in Matthew, to express the conduct of the church of Christ towards offending brethren, an evident analogy is pointed out in the latter church to the former, and in the punishments of the one to those of the other?

As the allusion, in fine, from the terms *Heathen* and *Publican*, is plainly Jewish, it will not be a valid objection against considering it as exclusion from their church which is intended, to tell us that it is only the brother who is offended that is to treat the offender as a Heathen and a Publican. If the brother who is offended is to abstain from religious communion with the offender on account of his sin, it is certainly no less strongly declared in this passage, that the church, who are no less offended than the brother, because the offender will not hear *them*, must treat him as a Heathen, and reject him from their fellowship.

dered in our version, "If there come into your assembly, "a man with a gold ring, &c." literally mean, "If there come into your *synagogue*." And what is translated in our Bibles, (Heb. x. 25), "forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," literally imports, "your meeting in a synagogue," επισυναγωγῆς. If the very name, however, *kahal* or *ecclesia*, here rendered church, be given frequently by the *Rabbis themselves* to the Jewish synagogue; if another term, often equivalent to this, and repeatedly used in the New Testament to denote a synagogue, be elsewhere applied to the Christian church; if the conduct which is here enjoined upon this church towards an obstinate offender, be expressed in language precisely the same with that which was descriptive of the conduct of the Jews to an impenitent offender whom they cast out of *their synagogue*; and if our Lord, when borrowing these terms from the synagogue, to denote his church, and its conduct towards offenders, gives no intimation that they were to be understood as to it, in a different acceptation than when applied to the former; it is plain, that to ascertain the import of this passage, we must have recourse to the practices of the Jewish synagogue, and inquire who were the persons in *that church*, or ἐκκλησία, to whom offences were told, and who judged respecting them.

In examining, however, who were the persons of the Jewish synagogue, or ἐκκλησία, that administered its affairs, and determined in this as well as other matters, we perceive that they were the rulers. This is evident not only from the testimony of the New Testament, but from the writings of their doctors. Thus, Acts xiii. 15. "And after the reading of the law and the prophets, *the rulers of the synagogue* (ἀρχισυναγωγοί) sent unto Paul and his companions," &c.\*: among which rulers it would ap-

\* Without entering particularly into the consideration of the propriety of the independent practice, of allowing any of *their members* who chuses to exhort the church when met together, I think it very obvious that one of the common arguments for it, which they frequently urge from the passage here quoted, is totally untenable. We are indeed here informed, that "after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them (Paul and his companions), saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." It is to be recollected however, that the church where they were, was not a *Christian congregation*, but a *Jewish synagogue*; and Vitringa,

pear that there was one who was president ; for we are informed, (Luke xiii. 14), that “ the ruler of the synagogue

I think, has proved incontestably in his Treatise on the Synagogue, lib. iii. pars i. cap. vii. that none but those who were considered as Rabbis or Doctors, and who were solemnly set apart by the imposition of hands, were permitted, after the reading of the law and the prophets, to exhort the people. For these, he tells us, there were particular seats in all their synagogues, and establishes his assertion by a variety of references. And in some of these seats he affirms, as we are told by Luke, (ver. 14.), that Paul and Barnabas having sat down, were considered by the rulers as Doctors, and were invited, according to the usual custom, to exhort, declaring at the same time, that it was contrary to the usual practice in the synagogue to allow the common members to perform this duty. His words are, (p. 709), “ At non de Christo modo, sed et illius apostolis et discipulis legimus, quod et illi *docentium cathedras* occupaverint, et inde pro *Doctoribus* ab iis agniti fuerint, quorum id scire intererat. Narratur id in Actis Apostolorum, cap. xiii, 14. *Ipsi vero digressi Perga venerunt Antiochiam Pisidiæ, et ingressi synagogam die Sabbati, καὶ ἐσέλθοντες ἐκάθισαν.* Sederunt Paulus et Barnabas synagogam ingressi. Intelligendum, occupasse eos *sedes docentium*, quod *sedere κατ’ ἐμψαων* est in scripturis sanctis (compare Matth. xxiii. 1, 2. xxvi. 55, &c.) Sciverunt enim inde archisynagogi, eo forte animo illos synagogam ingressos esse, ut *docerent*. Ita enim pergit Lucas: *Post lectionem autem legis et prophetarum miserunt præfecti synagogæ ad eos, dicentes: Viri, fratres, si quis est in vobis sermo exhortationis, dicite.* Quænam ratio fuisset, ut archisynagogi homines hos, sibi, ut plane videtur, ignotos ad *dicendum* invitassent, si *communia vulgi occupassent subsellia*, nulloque ex indicio de eorum aptitudine et docendi animo facti fuissent certiores? Et quodnam id esse potuit signum, quam *sessio*, cum nihil aliud de ipsis referatur, quam quod synagogam ingressi consederint? Cum vero solus *sedendi* actus non possit esse indicium vel *Doctoris*, vel intentionis docendi, omnino videtur, aliam hic significari sessionem, quæ *Doctorum* erat.” And the same also are the sentiments of Altlingius, who expressly affirms in his Schilo, lib. iii. cap. vi. “ Atque in hac usurpatione (sedendi) pro *Doctoribus* agniti sunt ab archisynagogis, qui facta legis et prophetarum lectione admiserunt, ut si meditati accessissent verba in coetu facerent. Neque enim rite hinc concluderis, cuivis peregrino hoc indultum fuisse ut publice diceret. Sed cum peregrini isti se *magistros* profiterentur *sedendi* privilegio, præfecti synagogæ, ipsis id honoris detulerunt.” Whatever then be the arguments which can be adduced by independents for allowing the members to address the church, it would appear that they are not entitled to advance any from the present passage. And though it is granted that it is the duty of believers in general, no less under the new than under the old dispensation, to converse with one another, in the house and by the way, upon the truths of religion, and provoke and exhort one another to every good work,



“(αρχισυναγωγος) answered with indignation, because Jesus “had healed on the Sabbath-day.” See also Mark v. 35, 36, 38. Acts xvii. 8, 17. Accordingly it is said by Josephus, in his account of his life, p. 1020 and 1022, that the synagogue at Tiberias was governed by a president, *αρχων*, and a senate of elders, *βουλην*: Συνειδων δε την μεταβολην Ιησους, τοις μιν δημον εκελειν αναχωρειν, προσκειναι δε την βουλην ηξιωσε; i. e. “But Jesus, the president, seeing the state of things altered, ordered the people to depart, but thought it proper “that the senate,” or, as it is in the Latin translation, *senatum solum*, “should remain.” And Maimonides, a celebrated Jewish Rabbi, in Hilcoth Taanioth, cap. iv. sect. i. in his Tract. de Jejuniis, represents a synagogue at Jerusalem as governed by one, whom he denominates *princeps* or chief, and *pater* or father, and a *synedrium aut collegium sapientium*, i. e. a senate, or college of wise men. The number of the rulers in their synagogues in large cities, according to Benjamin of Tudela, as quoted by Vitringa, was sometimes very great; and even in their least synagogues, “they were never less,” says Goodwin, (p. 58), “than three, that a major vote might cast it among them.” Now if a Jew, when offended, though he made known his complaint in the hearing of the other members of the synagogue, submitted it for judgment to the scribes and doctors, who were rulers of the synagogue, and them alone; and if our Saviour, when speaking of the manner in which an offended brother was to proceed in his church, uses precisely the very same language, and bids him tell it expressly to a *similar church*; is it not plain, that, so far at least as *the present passage* is concerned, instead of proving the right of every member of a Christian congregation to hear and judge in a case of offence, it demonstrates that this power, as in the *Jewish synagogue*, is committed to the rulers, and the rulers exclusively.

Again, as there was a right of appeal from the determination of the rulers of a particular synagogue to their great sanhedrin, or council of seventy, is it not obvious that *this*

it may perhaps be difficult to prove from the scriptures, that when a congregation is met in a *church-capacity*, any member who chuses is warranted to rise, and publicly to exhort, or admonish, or instruct them.

*passage*, instead of favouring the Independent plan, of constituting every congregation a complete court in itself, without subjecting it to the review of a Presbytery, strongly establishes the very contrary; and exhibits clearly these first principles of Presbyterians, that, as in the Jewish courts, it is the elders alone who are entitled to govern a particular congregation, and that these again are subject to the authoritative review of other courts, who can either affirm or reverse their decisions \* ?

It is said, in fine, that we are informed in *other* places, that the form of government in the New Testament church is *completely different* from that which existed in the synagogue and sanhedrin, and consequently that it cannot be inferred from *this* passage, that the administration should be committed in a particular congregation only to those who are elders, and that these again should be subject to the authoritative review of a higher court? It is replied, that when this is proved from *these other* passages, the inference will be dropt—that it is readily granted, that in *so far* as the form of government is demonstrated from *these* passages to be altered, it ought to be altered—but unless it can be evinced from them, that it is changed in the points about which we are *now* inquiring, and is taken from the elders in a particular congregation, and in an equal degree given to all the members of a congregation, without any possibility of appeal to a higher court, the inference is good. So far, however, as the passage before us is *viewed in itself*, and explained by the allusion to which it refers, though brought forward by you and the rest of your brethren, as *the first argument* for Independency, it seems naturally to establish the very contrary, and to prove that in a Christian congregation, as in a Jewish synagogue, it is the elders alone, and

\* Accordingly Prynne, a very noted ancient divine, who favoured some of the sentiments of Independents, in his Answer to Gillespie, affirms, in opposition to you, that by the church, or assembly, mentioned by Matthew, is intended, not the members of a particular congregation, but the *sanhedrin*; and quotes Josephus, as if he had spoken of this text, and applied the *very name* here employed by the Evangelist to that celebrated court. For an account of this court, and of the synagogue, with a solution of some objections urged against this argument, see Appendix.

not the members, and the elders as subordinate to the authoritative review of a superior court, who are appointed to govern the church of God \*.

\* It is urged indeed by Goodwin, (p. 60), that no argument can be adduced in favour of Presbytery, from the application of the terms descriptive of the synagogue and of the mode of procedure in it, in cases of offence to the Christian church, "because the manner is oftentimes to speak in the language of the Old Testament when the same thing," or an exact correspondency to it "is not meant; as when Christ speaks of the person offending, Matth. v. 22, he expresseth the degrees of punishment to several sins, under the names of three courts amongst the Jews, and yet he meaneth spiritual degrees of punishment. Thus, too, in 1 Cor. ix. 13, the whole service of the sanctuary is called *the altar* (he that serveth at the altar, must live of the altar); yet there is no such altar erected amongst us as was amongst the Jews. And the prophets also, prophesying of the times of the gospel, spake of our ordinances anew to be instituted in Old-Testament language; so, in Isaiah lxvi. 23. *They shall go from one new moon to another.* Though, under the gospel, we have not monthly feasts and meetings as they had, yet the meetings that we have are expressed thereby." From which he concludes, that "though Christ useth the same words to express the institution of the new churches of the gospel by, yet it follows not that it is of the same kind with the old, or that it runneth in the same way." But to this it is answered, that this passage is *not here advanced as an argument for Presbytery*, though it has been often brought forward with triumph, as an invincible argument in support of *Independency*—that all that is maintained is simply this, That if we consider the allusion, if it proves any thing, as viewed in itself, and without going elsewhere to discover the constitution of the church, it is in favour of the former, and not of the latter, and consequently that the argument which has so often been drawn from it for *Independency* necessarily falls. As we must have believed, from the passages produced from Goodwin, that there should be *altars*, and *new moons*, and *degrees of external punishment* among Christians, the same with those which we are assured existed among the Jews, unless it could be evinced from *other* passages, that a change was enjoined: so it is no less manifest from the present passage, that the government of the Christian church, in the point here specified, must resemble that of the Jewish synagogue, by the name of which it is called, unless it can be demonstrated from *other passages*, that it is appointed to be altered. And it will not suffice to establish this idea, to inform us that the term church, when applied, as in this place, to a Christian congregation, most commonly, in the New Testament, denotes the *whole* of the members as well as the rulers, since it is certain that it was understood in the same latitude of signification when applied also to a Jewish synagogue, and yet we know that when a complaint was told in it before the members at large, it was the rulers-

2dly, Though it could not be established, that there is a reference to the Jewish synagogues in this passage, it seems equally fair, and much more consistent, to understand by the term church, the elders of the congregation, than the congregation itself.

Nothing is more common than to say, that a thing is to be done to or for a body, which is done only to or by those of that body who represent the whole, and to whom it is competent. And no phraseology was more common among the Jews, than to say that a thing was done by a congregation, which was done only by the elders or rulers of that congregation. Thus, in the case of the manslayer, (Numb. xxxv. 24, 25), it is said, that “the *congregation* of the city “to which the manslayer and the avenger of blood belonged, should judge between them. And that the *congregation* should restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: And that he should abide in it till the “death of the high-priest.” Yet, if Moses may be allowed to explain his own words, even where this is so frequently ascribed to the *congregation*, it was the *elders* of the city alone who performed it. “But if any man,” says he, (Deut. xix. 11, 12), “hate his neighbour, and lie in wait “for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally “that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities, then the “*elders* of his city shall send, and fetch him thence, and “deliver him into the hands of the avenger of blood,” (*i. e.* after judging him), “that he may die.” Here we see, that what is in one place repeatedly ascribed to the congregation, is in the other asserted to be done only by the elders; and we are assured, that it was the prerogative of the *elders alone*, agreeably to the divine appointment, (Deut. xvi. 18), to judge the people. In Joshua xx. 4, 5, it is also said, that “when the manslayer that doth flee into one of these “cities, shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, “and shall declare his cause in the ears of *the elders* of the “city\*; and they shall take him to the city unto them,

alone who judged respecting it. Granting, therefore, all that is desired even by Independents, as to the proper import of the term church, or *ἐκκλησία*, no argument can be deduced from it in confirmation of their system.

\* The usual judges who sat in the gate; and who, if the city contained only a hundred and twenty families, amounted merely to

“and give him a place that he may dwell among them. “And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they “shall not deliver the slayer into his hand; because he “smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not before time.” And yet it is subjoined, that “he should “dwell in that city, until he stood before the *congregation* “for judgment.” Thus we perceive that while the *congregation* of the city from which he fled, are said, in this passage, to have judged in the case of the manslayer, in the preceding words we are told that the persons in the city to which he escaped, who heard and decided upon his case, were the *elders*; and, consequently, as the government of every city was the same, it must have been the elders who were to hear and judge of his conduct in the city from which he came, while yet we are told that he was to stand before the *congregation*. Accordingly we find, from Philo, Josephus, and other Jewish writers, that it was the elders alone, and not the people, who judged in their cities; and that the congregation, being considered as doing it by them, were said *themselves to have exercised the power of judgment*, though it was vested in and exercised only by the elders. Agreeably to this, likewise, the Greek translators, in their version of the Old Testament, render *kahal*, the strongest Hebrew word denoting the congregation, in Prov. xxvi. 26, by *συνοδον*, a *council* or *assembly of elders*\*.

three; and if it contained more, according to Josephus, amounted to seven, and according to the Talmudists, to twenty-three.

\* It is the same word which is used in Luke xxii. 66, and Acts iv. 15, to signify the council of the high-priest, the elders, and the scribes. See also Pasor, who quotes Demosthenes, according to the principle which has been now stated, as employing the word *εκκλησια*, the word rendered church in Matthew, and the term most frequently used in the Septuagint, even according to Independents, as the translation of *kahal* or *congregation*, for an assembly of nobles who were rulers. “Εφοβουντο δε μη εξαιφνης εκκλησια γενηται;” “Ubi accipi videtur (says he), pro concione *magnatum* “repente convocatorum,” *i. e.* “It seems to denote here an assembly of nobles or rulers suddenly convened.” And see, too, the author of the Guide to Zion, p. 5, and Ainsworth, in his Counterpoison, p. 113, who, though very keen and very respectable ancient Independents, admitted that the word *εκκλησια*, here rendered the church, is used repeatedly by the Seventy for the sanhedrin, who undoubtedly were an assembly only of rulers.



Since, then, it is plain, from these as well as other passages in the Old Testament, that it was common for things to be represented as strongly as told to and judged of by *the congregation*, as what is mentioned in Matthew to be told to *the church*, while yet it is certain, that it was only the elders of the congregation who were intended; is it not equally obvious, that when an offended Christian is there commanded to tell *the church* of the fault of his brother, even though there was no reference to the Jewish synagogue, that *it may be the elders of the church alone* who are designed, provided that it can be proved from other passages, that the government of the church is committed only to the former, as the government of each of the cities of Israel was committed only to the judges who sat in the gate\*? But that the government of the church is vested only in the former, as the government of each of the cities of Israel was intrusted to the latter, has already been attempted to be demonstrated; and, consequently, it will no more follow, though an offence is commanded to be told to and judged of by the church, that every member is intended by the term church, than that because the manslayer was required to tell his cause before *the congregation* of any of the cities of Israel, and “even stand before *them* for judgment,” every Israelite, who was a member of that congregation, was warranted, by the term *congregation*, to erect himself into a judge by the law of God.

Your argument, in fine, against *Presbyteries* and *Synods*, and other courts of review, from their not being mentioned in this passage, though frequently urged also by other Independents, appears to be most inconclusive. It is simply this, that because a thing is not mentioned in *one* passage of

\* Chrysostom, one of the early fathers after Christ, who must certainly have been acquainted with what was at *that time* the constitution of the Christian church, evidently understood this passage, not in the sense of Independents, but in the sense which is at present attached to it by Presbyterians. As quoted by Zanchius, in Quart. Præcept. and by Junius, Contr. iii. lib. ii. cap. vi, in his exposition of this place in Matthew, he asserts, that by *the church*, to whom the offence was to be told, was intended the *πρόεδροι καὶ ἡγεμόνες*, the presidents and rulers, who, as in 1 Thess. v. 12, 13, are always represented in the sacred volume, and are admitted even by Independents themselves, to be distinguished from the people, who are not allowed by them to be *nominal* governors.

scripture that treats of a particular subject, it is not to be found in *another* that relates to the same subject! But would not this, if followed out, lead us to set aside important parts of almost every doctrine and institution of Christianity, few of which, we know, are fully contained in *one* passage, and most of which are to be collected completely only from different passages? Besides, even granting that courts of review are not specified, a very good reason seems to be suggested, from the passage itself, why they should not at least be *directly* mentioned. It is obvious, that an appeal could only have been made to a superior court, *if the brother who was offended* had not received justice from the court to which he at first applied; for it is *he alone* who is represented as bringing the matter before an ecclesiastical assembly for their determination. Such a case, however, is not here supposed; for it is expressly stated, that the *first* court to which he applied gave a decision in his favour. But if the *first* court, as has been said, is here supposed to have given a decision in his favour; and if the *offending brother* is never said to have thought himself aggrieved by the decision which this court passed against him; and, as is insinuated, was even totally unsolicitous, and completely regardless, of bringing it before an ecclesiastical court at all; what propriety would there have been of introducing the possibility of an appeal to a higher court? Thus, then, it appears, that even *admitting* that such courts are not here mentioned, the omission is such as might naturally have been expected, and that no argument can be urged against them from this omission, if it can be proved upon that particular division of our subject, that they are clearly authorized by the word of God.

## LETTER VII.

SIR,

YOU remark in the next place, (p. 34, and 35), that the principles of Independency seem to be established with equal decision in the fifth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. As you have not, however, even *hinted* at the *common* arguments deduced by Independents from this passage, for the right of *members* to judge in the church, though you endeavour to prove from it, that a congregation cannot be subjected *to the review of the Presbytery*, permit me, before I consider the inferences which you draw from it for the latter position, to state very briefly the arguments for the former, as mentioned by Mr. Cotton, an eminent ancient American Independent, in his book entitled, "The Keys of the Kingdom," p. 44, 45, 46. He tells us in the first place, That the reproof for not proceeding to a sentence against the incestuous person is directed to the whole as well as to the Presbytery. "They are all blamed for not mourning," &c. 1 Cor. v. 2. 2dly, They are *all* commanded, when they are gathered together, to proceed against him, 1 Cor. v. 4, 5, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, to deliver such an one unto Satan." And again, in ver. 13, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." In the 3d place, He declares this act of theirs, in putting him away, to be a *judicial* act; for, says he, (ver. 12), "do not ye judge them that are within?" And 4thly, Upon his exhibiting evidence of his repentance, the Apostle enjoins the brethren at large, as well as the elders, to forgive him: 2 Cor. ii. 4—10. This, I believe, you will allow to be as able a statement of the arguments of Independents, which are drawn from this passage, as is any where to be found; and I confess that I consider it as much more plausible than any thing I have met with in Goodwin, Owen, Glass, or any other Independent. Even these, however, I can by no means admit to be valid arguments in support of this scheme, unless it could be established, *independently of them*, from *other* passages\*; and contend that

\* Passages, I mean, which completely preponderate in clearness and cogency over those which are urged for the Presbyterian scheme, and passages which cannot be interpreted upon it.

while the passages which have been already produced in favour of Presbytery seem totally inexplicable on any other scheme, this passage, as well as that which was last mentioned, seems to be equally explicable upon the principles of Presbyterians as upon those of Independents.

In confirmation of this general remark I observe, that when Paul reproves the whole of the Corinthians, (1 Cor. v. 2), “because they had not mourned,” he does not say that he blamed them because they had not *all* exercised the power with which according to Independents they were invested, and *excommunicated him themselves*, as judges or governors; but what strongly indicates that they had no such power—that, as the effect of this mourning, “he who had done this *might be taken away* from among them.” Now, though *all* the members are censured for not mourning, might not this censure be delivered to them upon the principles of Presbyterians, as well as upon those of Independents; for is it not the duty of the members, as well as of the rulers, though they do not judge, to mourn on account of the gross impurity of a Christian brother? And if the rulers neglect, as in this instance at Corinth, to mark their public disapprobation of his conduct, by inflicting upon him the merited punishment, is it not much more the duty of the members? Besides, when they are not commanded to mourn that *they themselves had not taken him away*, but simply that, as *the consequence of their sorrow*, stirring up their rulers to a sense of their duty, he might *be taken away from them*, is it not plain that this passage, instead of favouring the principles of Independency, seems fairly to establish the very opposite, and that the power of discipline is vested in the elders, and not in the members of the church?

Nor will the command of Paul to the Corinthians, “to deliver up the incestuous person to Satan when they were gathered together, and to put away from among themselves that wicked person,” with this declaration that they had a power “to judge them who were within,” suffice to prove that the members at large exercised a similar power with those who were their rulers in administering the government of that Christian church. That they are *susceptible* of this interpretation, if viewed in themselves, and without attending to other passages of scripture, I readily grant—but not more so than those passages which assert that Christ is the propitiation for the sins not only of the Jews, but of *the whole world*, and that he gave himself a ransom

for *all*, if considered merely in themselves, are susceptible of an explication which excludes the doctrine of *particular*, and establishes the Arminian doctrine of *universal* redemption. Now, if you would deny the inference deduced by Arminians from these latter passages in support of their system, by observing that these passages are no less susceptible of an explication upon *Calvinistic* than upon *Arminian* principles, while at the same time you produce a greater number of passages, stronger and more decided, which cannot be explained upon the principles of Arminians, is it not *equally* fair, if it can be proved that even the strongest expressions in this place, descriptive of the power of the church of Corinth, can be explained *equally* upon the principles of Presbyterians as upon those of Independents, while at the same time a number of other passages can be adduced in favour of Presbytery totally inexplicable upon the Independent plan—is it not *equally* fair, I say, to maintain that these expressions, in this place, no more establish the principles of Independency, than the expressions in the other instance, which are *no less* energetic, establish the principles of *universal redemption*?

Can such expressions, however, as those which are here used, be equally explained upon the supposition of Presbyterians, that it is the rulers of the church, and not the members at large, who are intended? Yes; for as was remarked, nothing is more common than to represent a thing as done by a body at large, while it is done only by those in that body to whom it is competent. Thus we are informed in scripture, that the great *city* Rome reigned over the kings of the earth, (Rev. xvii. 18), while yet we know that the world was governed, at the period referred to, not by the *citizens of Rome*, but by the emperor and senate; and thus nothing is more frequent, both in speech and writing, than to say that *the people of Great Britain* govern their American colonies, while it is only the king and parliament who thus govern them. Thus, too, we see that precepts are often addressed to bodies in general to be observed by them, which yet could be observed only with propriety by those who were their rulers, while, at the same time, others are to fulfil, in their various spheres, what is personally required from them. “If thy brother,” said Moses to the people of Israel, (Deut. xiii. 6, &c.), “the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife-



“ of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, “ entice thee secretly saying, Let us go and serve other “ gods—(ver. 8), thou shalt not consent unto him, nor “ hearken unto him ; neither shall thine eye pity him, nei- “ ther shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him ; but “ thou shalt surely kill him.” Now, who would imagine, from this command of Moses, that *the Israelites at large* were to kill any person who should entice them to idolatry, till he was previously tried and condemned by the judges upon the deposition of witnesses ? And yet is it not obvious that this injunction is here addressed to *them at large*, as strongly and directly as the command is here addressed by Paul to the members at Corinth, to punish the incestuous person of whom he speaks ? Is it not plain also, that every Israelite was *as much* authorised by these words of his law-giver, viewed in themselves, to judge and put to death such an enticer to idolatry, as the Corinthians were authorized in these words of Paul, to judge and excommunicate their offending brother ? And are not *the Jews in general* often reproved by the prophets, (see Jer. v. 28, and vi. 5, &c.) for most flagrant violations of equity in the public administration of justice, as well as for other crimes, which could be committed only by the rulers ? But who would imagine from this, that *every Israelite* was a *civil judge*, or that it was not *the rulers alone* who were responsible for these crimes ; and that notwithstanding the general expressions which are employed, that the people were only accessory to the guilt, in as far as they approved of their conduct, and did not witness against it ? Besides, is it not, notwithstanding, undeniable, that these passages as plainly and expressly enjoin *every Israelite* to administer public justice with fidelity and impartiality \*, as the Apostle tells the members of the church at Corinth, that they might judge them who were within their communion, and might put away from themselves wicked persons ? And is it not manifest, that they as explicitly blame *the Israelites at large*, though they

\* See also Deut. xvi. 19, where after it had been mentioned in the preceding verse, that judges were to be appointed in the gates of every city, who alone were to judge the people, it is said notwithstanding to *every Israelite*, “ Thou shalt not wrest judgment, “ thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift : for a gift doth “ blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righte- “ ous.”

were not judges, for not administering justice in this manner, as that the Apostle blames the Corinthians *in general* for not putting away the incestuous person? If, then, while *the Israelites at large* are commanded to administer public justice with fidelity and impartiality, it will not follow that *each* of them was authorised to be a civil judge, because the power of judging appears, from *other passages*, to have been committed to those who were appointed to be *rulers*; it will no more follow, that though the Corinthians are informed that they were to judge those who were within their communion, that every Corinthian member was to be a judge, if it can be proved, as has been attempted, from *other passages*, that this power is vested in the elders alone, and that every member is not entitled, either nominally or really, to the power of a ruler. And if, while *the Israelites in general* were blamed for not thus administering justice, it was the *rulers* alone, and not the people, who were intended, though the latter also were reprobated, so far as they acquiesced in their conduct, and did not testify against it; it is equally incontestable, that since, as we have endeavoured to demonstrate, there are similar rulers in every Christian church, to whom the government is intrusted, though the Corinthians *at large* are censured for not excommunicating the offender, it was *the rulers alone* who were referred to by the Apostle, and that no argument of course can be deduced from this passage for the right of the members, in common with the ministers, to administer the affairs of the church of God\*.

Thus even though it were granted, that the incestuous person was to be delivered over to Satan when *the whole of the members were met together*, it will not follow that *every one* of them, in a judicial capacity, was so to deliver him up, but only the rulers; for it has been contended even by many Presbyterians, with Cyprian of old, that whatever is done, should be done in the presence of all the members of the

\* From this reasoning also, if valid and conclusive against the possibility of proving from these general expressions that the Corinthians nominally and ostensibly ruled as well as their elders, it is no less plain that it cannot be evinced from them that they judged and voted in any form, any more than it can be established from the expressions employed respecting the Israelites, that their consent and vote were necessary to be asked before any sentence could be passed by their civil judges.

church for their satisfaction \*. But is it a necessary consequence, that because discipline was to be exercised *in the presence* of all the members, *each of them* was to exercise it ?

\* We know, however, as will afterwards be noticed, that in the case of the reference of the church of Antioch to that at Jerusalem, the apostles, and elders, and brethren, did not repair to Antioch to discuss the matter in the hearing of these Christians, and answer their objections: and we will attempt to shew, that it was not an extraordinary instance. And even your brother, Mr. Ewing, who quotes with such approbation, (p. 83), the words of Hales respecting the Synod of Dort, "That it went like a watch, the main wheels of which, upon which the whole business turns, are least in sight; for all things of moment were acted in private sessions: and what was done in public, was only for shew and entertainment:" that man, I say, who quotes with such approbation this sneer at the secrecy of the proceedings of this Synod, himself contends, as was before observed, for a *similar secrecy* in some of the deliberations in his church. "Every thing," he affirms, as was formerly remarked, "is not to be brought even before an *Independent* church for general discussion, or for obtaining a public declaration of the mind of each member before the office-bearers shall presume to put it in practice." He even asserts that "to do so, would deprive the church of the benefit of *government*, and would endanger the cause of *truth* and of *Christian liberty*." He insinuates of course, that *some* of the meetings and proceedings, even of *their* office-bearers, must be *private*; and even explicitly declares, (p. 36, 37), that "if any of their members are offended by the decisions of the office-bearers in these *private* meetings, and cannot prevail with them to change their opinion, they must separate from the church." It seems, then, that even also in this gentleman's *Independent congregation*, while he smiles at the jest when uttered against Presbyterians, in a number of instances, "the office-bearers are like a watch; the main wheels of which, upon which the whole business turns, are least in sight; for things, even of such moment as that a difference of sentiment warrants separation, are acted in *private sessions*; and the liberty of speaking, at least upon them, which is granted to the members when they are announced in public, after they have been determined by the office-bearers, is only for *shew* and *entertainment*."

If he says, it is only in trivial matters, and matters which are obvious, that the office-bearers are allowed to deliberate and determine alone, without the presence and concurrence of the members; it is answered, that they are matters, a difference of sentiment upon which, by his own acknowledgement, warrants separation, and authorizes Christians, agreeably to the passage of scripture which he cites, (2 Tim. iii. 5), "to turn away" from the communion of those who hold them, and to dissolve the most solemn and endearing relations. Is such a separation, however, to take place, which is often represented in the word of God as a thing so serious, and are such relations to be dissolved, which constitute an

Though the court of civil justice, in a particular town, may be held by the magistrates in the presence of the inhabitants, who are invited perhaps to attend, does it follow that every

union so important and intimate, for things which are *obvious* and *trivial* in their nature? If so, how *light* and *insignificant* indeed must separation from a church appear to Independents who adopt his sentiments, and how precarious and dangerous must be the situation of those societies where they are acted upon as a principle! Need we be surprized at those frequent successive changes which appear in the conduct of some of their members, who are authorized by one of the most eminent and zealous of their ministers, supported as he imagines by the command of scripture, to move from their communion upon *the least* alteration in their sentiments, and constitute a new church, which again must be broken down into innumerable fragments upon every new alteration, though trivial and uninteresting? Such privileges may perhaps be dignified by some with the name of *liberty*, but it is a liberty which seems to be more worthy of the name of *licentiousness*. And however it may be suited to the dispositions of those who, from impatience of controul, cannot brook that their proposals should not uniformly be followed in the society to which they belong, or from imaginary advancing perfection in knowledge, are continually changing in some degree their opinions, it appears to be little fitted to promote the honour or interest of religion, or to subserve the advancement of practical godliness. Nothing undoubtedly more directly tends to deaden the influence of this principle in the heart, than the indulgence of a restless schismatic spirit, even for matters of *indifference*, for which these words of Mr. Ewing present such toleration. And nothing evidently more infallibly leads to injure the cause of Christianity in the world, than such repeated changes of religious fellowship, and renunciations of so important and endearing relations for every trifle, to which the system of this gentleman presents such encouragement.

If it be urged, that he does not recommend, but only permits, these separations; it is answered, that he declares in the most decided terms, (p. 37), "that those who cannot make their brethren hear them in what they believe to be the doctrine of scripture" (*i. e.* by the supposition, even in trivial matters) are at *perfect liberty*, as they are *in duty bound*, from such brethren to turn away, "2 Tim. iii. 5." And it is remarkable that the passage which he adduces for this separation, even for these trivial differences, denotes a turning away from them, which is totally incompatible even with their participating occasionally in the sacrament of the supper with the men whom they thus leave.

If it be alleged on the contrary, to save his honour, that it is matters of *importance* about which Mr. Ewing speaks, and by difference of opinion upon which, he considers separation as warrantable; it is replied, that such an affirmation is completely opposite to the whole of his reasoning in the two preceding pages, which avowedly refers only to things "trivial and obvious." And it

When a majority, in a word, of any of your churches determines against a minority, that a brother who has happened to offend before all, should be *rebuked* before all, that he may be taught by it to be ashamed, I should be glad to know, if it is only a *simple advice* which is delivered? And when such a majority decides against a minority, that a brother is to be *excommunicated*, and their decision is fulfilled, I should be happy to be informed, if it is only a *simple opinion* which is stated? This, I believe, you will hardly maintain: and consequently, since in these and all other instances, where the will of a majority is carried and acted upon against a minority, from the very nature of things, authority is exercised, I hold it to be unfair and contradictory in Independents to declaim against Presbyterians, when they claim for *their rulers*, the *same portion* of authority which is necessarily assumed by the majority of *the members* in each of their congregations; and without which, whatever *persuasion* might be employed, and whatever *advices* might be delivered, not one of their societies can be conceived to exist.

You affirm, however, that to exercise authority without the presence and consent of the members of the church is inconsistent with the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, one of the laws of which is, that before a person can perform any acceptable act of worship, he must have, in some measure, a conviction of its fitness and propriety. And you contend, that since a man must first be convinced by persuasion, before he can render any such obedience, authority is unnecessary, for if authority is used as well as persuasion, it seems to imply that the latter is insufficient. But in answer to this I would observe, that though authority is claimed by Presbyterian rulers over their members, it is not an *unreasonable* nor *imperious* authority. They consider themselves as the *servants* of the Lord Jesus: the subjection which they demand from the members of their churches, is not to themselves, or to their *will*, as you insinuate (p. 47), but to what they consider as the will of their blessed Master; and the obedience which they require to their decisions in his name, is not, as you allege, blind and compulsory, but enlightened and voluntary. Nor do they barely deliver their commands, and enjoin *immediate* and *implicit* submission (as one would imagine from your representation); but while they declare authoritatively whatever appears to



them to be the mind of Christ, and command all cordially to obey it, they, no less than Independents, are careful to state the grounds upon which their decision rests, and to afford to their members every mean by which their consciences may be satisfied, and this enlightened and voluntary obedience produced. Their public deliberations in every instance, where it is fit, are open to the hearing and examination of their members; and there seems to be *nothing in Presbyterianism* to prevent every discussion which is proper to be carried on before an Independent, to be carried on also before a Presbyterian congregation. The reasons, besides, for every determination are not only uniformly stated, as has been already mentioned, but if any of their members either do not understand their meaning, or perceive their force, they are never denied an opportunity of obtaining satisfaction by private conversation, or correspondence with the rulers. If, in any case, in short, of inferior magnitude, they cannot acquiesce in the decision of these rulers, forbearance can be granted to them no less than among Independents; and if, in any case, it be necessary to separate, because it is of superior importance, and they cannot comply, they are not *compelled* to obey, but are allowed to separate no less than among them.

There is one point, however, and but *one*, in which Presbyterians appear to differ from Independents on the subject before us, and on this you seem to lay considerable stress; namely, that though the obedience which is required from their members by the former, is as free and as enlightened as that which is demanded from their members by the latter, Presbyterian rulers do not admit their people to judge and vote upon the propriety of their measures along with themselves, before they are finally adopted. But to this fact the words of Mr. Ewing, which I have quoted, furnish a complete and satisfactory answer. Nothing, undoubtedly, more directly tends to *subvert the order and government* of the church, as that gentleman affirms, than to allow every member a right to judge and vote upon the measures of rulers, and to oblige these rulers to retract or carry forward any of these measures, only in as far as it is agreeable to a majority of the people. It is, in fact, constituting those who should *be ruled*, the *rulers*, while the decisions of those who are dignified with that name are entirely subject to their determination. Their opinions, it is

fellowship with him, that he might be ashamed, and that others might fear.

Is it said, in short, that as *all* the Corinthians are commanded to forgive their offending brother, (2 Cor. ii. 7—10), they must *all* have been rulers? It is replied, that this consequence appears by no means to follow—but that all that can be deduced from it is this, that as they had all been offended by him in their *various stations*, so they were all to forgive him upon tokens of his repentance, and express their forgiveness in a manner which was suited to *their situation* in the church. Those who were rulers, and were offended by him in that capacity, were commanded *as such* to forgive him, and restore him again to the privileges of their society; and those who were members, and had been offended by him *as such*, on account of the dishonour which he had done to God, were called *as such* to express their forgiveness, and restore him once more to the comforts and advantages of private fellowship. Thus it would appear, that neither from this in particular, nor from any other expression contained in this passage, we are warranted to conclude that the members at large, in common with the rulers, are entitled to govern the church of Christ.

## LETTER VIII.

SIR,

IN proof of your opinion you farther affirm, (p. 38), that the people must be admitted to judge and vote, because, in the reference to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem from the church of Antioch, "they are represented as *all* uniting in "the decision that was formed on the question appealed." Thus we are told, that "it pleased the apostles and elders, "with the *whole church*, to send chosen men of their company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas," &c. ; and "that they wrote letters by them after this manner: The "apostles, and elders, and *brethren*, send greeting unto the "brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, "and Cilicia." Let it be supposed for a moment, that the brethren, here mentioned, were not *the other* ministers who were then at Jerusalem besides the apostles and elders: if it be asserted that these members, *in any form*, voted and judged in the case referred to, while it seems to establish in one view, it completely subverts in another, the scheme for which it is urged. You argue against Presbyterians when they attempt to demonstrate from this passage, that one congregation, with its rulers, may be subject to the rulers of a number of congregations met as a Presbytery, and tell them that this case was *extraordinary*. Mr. Ewing observes, in his Lecture, p. 77, that "*the miraculous gifts* of "the Spirit were *very generally* enjoyed in the church at "Jerusalem;" and seems to insinuate from this, the propriety of their being admitted, in a particular view, as *ecclesiastical arbiters*, to *adopt* and *transmit* the judgment of the apostles and elders as their judgment. You yourself also affirm, that all who passed this decision were under this influence, though in different degrees: for while you represent the apostles, and elders, and brethren, "as united in "making it," you declare it to be *extraordinary*; adding, (p. 44), "if it was not extraordinary, let us see to "what it will lead." But if the argument which is advanced by Presbyterians from this passage for a court of review, above the ministers or elders of a particular congregation, composed of the ministers of a number of congregations, seems to you inconclusive, because this assembly was inspired, and delivered an extraordinary inspired decision, must

it not be equally inconclusive when urged by Independents for the right of the people to judge and vote in their religious assemblies? If the ministers and elders of different congregations now, who correspond to the elders associated with the apostles, are not to judge as a *Presbytery* in matters which relate to *another* congregation, because, though they determined along with them in the appeal from Antioch, the whole of them were guided by a miraculous energy, on what principle can it be proved that *the people* now are to judge and vote, because *the people* at Jerusalem judged and voted under the guidance of this extraordinary infallible energy? Is it alleged with Mr. Ewing, (p. 78), that though the apostles and elders were inspired, Presbyterians allow their ministers, whom they call their successors, though not inspired, to judge and rule, and why not allow the members now to judge and vote, since they are the *successors* of those ancient members who sat and judged in this inspired assembly? We allow, that if it could be proved that this assembly was *inspired*, no argument would be urged by Presbyterians for the ministers and elders of a number of congregations deliberating, as an authoritative court of review, in any appeal which is made, as in the case here recorded, by a single church. It follows, therefore, upon his own *principles* as well as those of *Presbyterians*, that since he and his brethren consider this assembly as composed of persons *supernaturally* qualified for the decision which they delivered, in no point of view are they entitled to conclude, from what they apprehend to be said of the *brethren* judging in this *extraordinary* meeting, and under this *miraculous influence*, that members *now*, and upon *common* occasions, are warranted to judge in the church of God.

The argument, besides, adduced by you and Mr. Ewing, in common with Mr. Glass, for the right of the members to judge at present in the affairs of the church, from what is here said of the brethren at Jerusalem, if it prove any thing, proves undoubtedly *too much*. It demonstrates not merely their right to judge and vote in matters which relate to their *own*, but in those which concern even another congregation. But does not this contradict a first principle of Independency, that neither the members nor the rulers of *one* congregation have a right to interfere, even according to your own acknowledgement, (p. 30), and according to the favourite position of Glass which he so keenly de-

tends \*, with any *other* congregation under heaven? Besides, would not the subordination to which this argument leads, a subordination of a particular congregation, not merely, as Presbyterians maintain, to the ministers and lay-elders, the *wisest and most enlightened of a number of congregations*, but to *the members indiscriminately* of a sister congregation, be much more intolerable, even upon your own principles, than that for which the former contend? On the whole, whether this assembly was inspired or not inspired, if it be asserted that the brethren must judge now because they judged then, it will necessarily follow, not only that the brethren of one congregation may judge in matters which are to bind the brethren of another congregation, but that they may judge of them finally while the latter are not present, nor give their consent. But does not this contradict also another Independent principle, as stated by you, p. 30, “That whatever is done by those who are appointed to rule, is carried on in the presence of the general body, and with their consent?” And will it not completely oppose another favourite position of Glass, and Lockier, and other Independents, “That nothing can be binding upon any society where their acquiescence and votes have not previously been asked and obtained?”

Or is it said, that the assembly at Jerusalem was not inspired, and that the reference made to them was simply for *opinion and advice*? On this supposition, no *judicial power* at all was exercised, no act of *government* was performed by *any of them*; and consequently, though it were admitted that the brethren at Jerusalem were allowed, along with the apostles and elders, *to state their opinion* upon the controverted points, no argument can be adduced from it for the right of the brethren at present to *govern and vote* in the church. *Governing the church and exercising discipline* are certainly very different from a *mere statement of opinion* upon a controverted point, which either might be received or rejected. And if the apostles, and elders, and members in the case before us, merely gave an advice, and stated an opinion, (as is done by the occasional associations of your ministers, while, as you declare, p. 31, 32, &c. it is not binding upon any of your congregation), it will never follow that because the brethren were permitted to do this, they are

\* See his Works, vol. i. p. 155—202.



authorised to govern or exercise discipline. In no view then does any argument seem to be deducible from this passage, for the right of the people to judge and vote in matters which relate to the government and discipline of the church of Christ.

Again, supposing that this assembly at Jerusalem was neither an extraordinary assembly, nor a meeting convened merely for delivering an advice, but, as will afterwards at least be attempted to be proved, an *authoritative*, though an *uninspired* ecclesiastical court, I do not see how any argument can be drawn from it for the right of the members to judge in the church. If so, it would follow, as has been already said, that, like the brethren at Jerusalem, the brethren now could exercise even an *authoritive power*; that they would be entitled likewise, like those at Jerusalem, to govern not only their own, but even *other* congregations; and that they would be warranted also authoritatively to govern these congregations, even when they were not present, and could not consent to their decisions; all of which suppositions are manifestly inconsistent with the declared principles of Independents. The truth therefore seems to be, according to the sentiments of some Presbyterians, that though the members at Jerusalem expressed their *acquiescence* in the decision of the apostles and elders (a circumstance which could not fail to have uncommon weight upon the minds of the believing Jews at Antioch, as they must previously have been no less attached than themselves to the distinguishing peculiarities of the law of Moses), they by no means appear to have judged authoritatively, or even voted in the matter. It was to the apostles and elders alone, and not to the members, that the church at Antioch are said to have referred their cause: Acts xv. 2. But if the members at Jerusalem, who were greatly more numerous than the apostles and elders, sat in the court, and if the decision could have been carried only, according to the constitution of the Christian church, if agreeable to a majority of them, then since, on account of their number, it must have been known at Antioch that it was they *alone principally* who were to fix the determination, the reference should have been made *principally* to them. It is the apostles and elders, too, alone, (ver. 6), who are said to have come together *to consider the matter*. But if it was considered *by the brethren* as well as by them, and, as is witnessed *at present* in Independent

congregations, *could not be determined without their consent*, how is it that they are not mentioned as constituting a part of that assembly which convened to deliberate on this interesting reference. During the deliberation, moreover, it was only the apostles and elders, and not the brethren, who are said to have spoken; and when the decision was made, and sent away, it is called "the decrees, not of the apostles, "and elders, and brethren," (Acts xvi. 4), as we must naturally have expected upon the principles of Independents, but "the decrees" merely "of the apostles and elders." This appears to be wholly inexplicable upon the scheme of those Independents who suppose that this meeting was but an ordinary assembly, in which the private members sat as well as the apostles and elders, and as they were allowed equally to express their judgment and state their vote, from their *superior* number, must have had more influence than they in passing the determination.

It is indeed said, (Acts xv. 12), that "all the multitude "kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought "among the Gentles by them." But allowing that by the multitude we are here to understand the private members, and not the body of the apostles and other ministers, who certainly would constitute a very numerous assembly, it cannot be demonstrated from their being said to have *kept silence* during the speeches of these ministers, that they had previously spoken and debated in this meeting. All that is necessarily suggested is, that during this wonderful narrative of facts, "they were quiet, or held their peace from "that noise or murmuring" which is often witnessed in multitudes, and which, perhaps, might have been experienced during the *preceding* speeches; in other words, they listened attentively. Does it follow, however, that because the attention of the audience was completely commanded, that the whole of the multitude, as well as the apostles and elders, had publicly spoken as judges upon this occasion? It is also said, that "it pleased the whole church, as well as "the apostles and elders, (ver. 22), to send chosen men with "their determination to Antioch." Admitting, however, that by the whole church, or assembly, (ἐκκλησία), is not intended the rest of the *office-bearers* who compose this meeting besides the apostles and elders, it deserves to be remarked, says the ingenious Mr. Muir, that what is here

stated respecting the members, if it be the members who are meant, did not take place till the deliberation was finished, and the sentence was passed, which as we have now seen, was performed entirely by the apostles and elders. The church, moreover, he adds, if we choose rather to retain this translation of the word, and intend by it the members, might well be said to be pleased with the measure, and to express their acquiescence, though they were not allowed, in any view, *judicially* to signify their mind respecting it. The apostles and elders might determine that two of the brethren should go up to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, to testify the acquiescence of the whole in the decision, and might call upon the multitude, as at the election of the deacons, to look out from among themselves two men for this purpose. Upon their complying with the request, and choosing from among themselves Judas and Silas, it might strictly be said that it *pleased* them as well as the apostles and elders, to send these brethren to the church at Antioch, while yet, agreeably to the history, they neither publicly judged nor voted in the matter. But the letters, it may be said, which were written to Antioch, were written in the name of the brethren as well as of the apostles and elders; and the whole of them are represented as saying to the church at Antioch, (ver. 28), that it seemed good to them as well as to the Holy Ghost, to lay upon them no greater burden than necessary things. It seems plain, however, that it might be represented as pleasing the members, if they be referred to, only so far as *acquiescing* in the decision which was made by the apostles and elders, and not as themselves joining *judicially* in the deliberation or determination; and that it is in this view that their names are inserted in the letters. The reference was not made to them, and would they ever have presumed to have judged in a cause in which they were not appealed to? They are never named among those who came together to consider the matter, and can we suppose that, if they did not meet either for deliberation or decision, they determined in this cause, either *virtually* or *ostensibly*, as ecclesiastical judges? Besides, when the sacred historian speaks of the decision which was contained in these letters, and of the persons who passed it as ecclesiastical judges, he affirms, as has been said repeatedly, that it was pronounced only by the apostles and elders; chap. xvi. ver. 4. To make the historian therefore *consistent with himself*, it

is necessary to consider him here as telling us, that the brethren merely acquiesced in what was done by the apostles and elders. Or if it be said once more with Mr. Ewing \*, that though the brethren did not at first judge in this appeal, yet they had the honour of *adopting* and *transmitting* the judgment of the apostles and elders as their judgment? It is answered, that if this amounted to any thing more than a mere declaration of their acquiescence and approbation--if it contained in it any thing which can be considered as judicial, it is liable to all the objections we have mentioned. It was a transmitting their judgment as ecclesiastical judges, in a case in which they were never *appealed to* : it was a judicial examination and decision of a matter which they are never even said to have assembled with the apostles and elders *to consider* : and it was a transmitting their judgment with all the authority of arbiters (if they too, as he affirms, p. 78, at the top, are among the persons who declare that it seemed good to them *judicially* to *lay upon the disciples at Antioch* necessary burdens), while, even upon this gentleman's principles, and those of every Independent, they were *not entitled* to lay upon them *any* burden ; and while, as has been stated, in the account afterwards delivered of those who then judged, and laid this burden upon the disciples, their name is never mentioned. How could the brethren of *one* congregation *lay judicially* any necessary burdens upon the brethren of *another* congregation, call it an adopting or transmitting the judgment of the apostles and elders, or what you please? Or if it was not an *ostensible judicial* power, but simply of the kind which is claimed by the members of an *Independent congregation* that is supposed to have been exercised by these members at Jerusalem, upon what ground, and I request it to be particularly considered, could they exercise even *this* over the members at Antioch? Is it consistent with the distinguishing principles of Independents, to allow to the members of *one* of their churches the same power of judging over the members of *another*, by whatever name you call it, which is uniformly exerted by them before any thing can be passed in their own society? But if it be repugnant even to the principles of *Independents themselves*, to grant to the members of *one* congregation the same power of judging as to

\* See his Lecture, p. 77, near the foot.

the affairs of *another* which they assume in their own, upon what ground can they affirm that a power merely of this kind, though *nominally inferior* to that of the ministers, was exercised by the members of the church at Jerusalem, though associated with the apostles and elders, over the members at Antioch? On the whole it may be remarked, that as Mr. Ewing admits, (p. 77), that from this decision of the apostles there was no *dissent* or *appeal*, even though it should be granted that the brethren were allowed to adopt and transmit to the church at Antioch *their* judgment as their own, it seems impossible to establish from it the right of the brethren not only to adopt, if they are pleased, but, as is frequently witnessed, to *reject* and *nullify*, if they are dissatisfied, the decisions of their office-bearers. Because they were permitted, in *one* instance, to testify their approbation of the determination of their rulers, and adopt, as their judgment, a judgment from which they could neither *dissent* nor *appeal*, will it ever follow that if they are not pleased with a decision or proposal of their rulers, they have power to set it aside, and bring forward another, however contrary to the mind of the former?

On a review, then, of this as well as the preceding passages, on which your scheme is founded, it does not appear that we are warranted by them to believe that the members of the church, in every deliberation, are to express their judgment, and state their vote; while, from the various arguments which were adduced before, it seems necessarily to follow that the elders alone, without the consent and judgment of the people, are authorised to govern the church of God.



## APPENDIX TO LETTER VIII.

WHATEVER may be the declarations of scripture with regard to this matter, it has been urged by Independents with the utmost confidence, that ecclesiastical antiquity universally affirms that such privileges were granted to Christian people in the primitive church. Mr. Ewing, in particular, has quoted with approbation King's Inquiry into the Primitive Church, as supporting his opinion, "that the largest churches, in the third century, were only single congregations; and Glass has adduced the authority of Cyprian, to shew that, at that period, every thing was done according to the determination of the people. But admitting that these assertions could not be disproved, it might be sufficient to reply to them in the very decided expressions of the first of these writers, respecting the validity of arguments deduced from antiquity against the doctrine of Lay-preaching. "Mr. Dick," says he, in his Remarks upon a Sermon in Refutation of Lay-preaching, "confirms his argument," to use Mr. Ewing's own *dignified satire*, "by some *anecdotes* taken from ecclesiastical history. As my Bible "stops at the end of the book of the Revelation, *I am not very careful to answer in these matters.*" Why then, if the word of God be perfect, and fitted to furnish us thoroughly for every good work, should Independents wish that Presbyterians should be careful to answer *them* in *this* matter, even allowing that they could demonstrate that in the primitive churches, it was by the vote of the people that every measure was adopted or rejected? Besides, we are certain from the sacred oracles, as well as the earliest ecclesiastical writers, that many flagrant errors were admitted in the church, both in the days of the apostles, and in the period which immediately succeeded their death \*. To prove

\* See Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, &c.—It is remarkable also, that most of the testimonies produced by King, for the power which Independents would give to the people, are taken from Cyprian, a father who flourished in the third century. But, says an Independent (Liverpool Theological Repository. vol. iv. p. 306), when he would invalidate the evidence adduced by King, from ecclesiastical antiquity, for Presbyterian Synods, "All the instances of them, which Lord King produces, are in the third century, and therefore within a time when infant-communion, consecra-

that a thing is lawful or proper, it is not sufficient to tell us, that it was very generally practised by the church in the primitive ages, but it must be shewn to be agreeable to the word of God. To this standard we are to bring their *practices* as well as their doctrines; and by it alone, notwithstanding their proximity to the apostles in point of time, are to decide whether what was admitted and followed by them should be adopted and imitated, or rejected and set aside.

Even when we examine the remains of ecclesiastical antiquity on the point in question, to ascertain, not what should be followed as an *infallible* example, but what was then acknowledged as the constitution of the church, there are various considerations which demand our attention. 1st, It is probable that in different churches, the government, as well as worship and ceremonies, were different. Accordingly, we find that some of the early fathers ascribe to the people a greater, and some of them a smaller portion of power. 2dly, As the clergy, when afterwards raised, by the extravagant and imprudent liberality of Constantine, to a dignity and grandeur like that of secular princes, infringed the rights and privileges of the people, so, in the preceding ages, when the governors of the church were so entirely dependent upon the caprices of the people, they might experience it to be requisite to recede in some measure from their legitimate rights, and grant to the people a degree of power to which they were not entitled. Allowing, then, that Independents could prove that the fathers granted to the people, in many of their churches, a degree of power as great as that for which they now contend, it is evident that on their own principles, as well as what has now been stated, no argument can be advanced from it for a similar power to Christian members in the present day. It must previously be proved that the clergy were not induced to grant them this power from considerations, perhaps, of a false and reprehensible

“tion of elements, use of chrism, sign of the cross, and other errors  
 “in doctrine and discipline, had entered into, and obtained a foot-  
 “ing in the church of Christ.” Now, if this circumstance appear  
 to Independents in general to destroy the force of the argument  
 which is brought from the writings of Cyprian for *Presbyterian Synods*, must it not equally destroy the *strongest and most numerous arguments* of independents from ecclesiastical antiquity, which are founded on the sense which they attach to certain passages collected from the writings of the same ancient father?

prudence ; and that, if they acted from conviction, their sentiments, upon this head, are not to be numbered among their errors, but, as they are confirmed by scripture, are to be reckoned among their excellencies, and to be regarded by us as patterns for our imitation.

That these passages moreover produced by King, from a few of the fathers, will warrant the conclusion which he wishes to draw from them, is by no means evident. In his very first authority, from Clemens Romanus, (p. 116), he takes it for granted, that the term *πληθος* denotes the members, when, as will afterwards be proved, it is frequently applied only to the rulers of the church ; and if it signify the members, he forgets to shew that what they are here affirmed by Clemens to perform, might not be performed by them by means of their office-bearers. His second authority, from Origen, represents a criminal as appearing before a congregation, but says not a word of his being judged by them. And even the strongest expressions adduced from Cyprian respecting the power of the people, seems to be too dubious and obscure to authorise any certain conclusion as to the constitution of that Christian church. “ Ad id  
“ vera (says that father, Epist. v. p. 12. edit. Rigalt.) quod  
“ scripserunt mihi compresbyteri nostri Donatus et Fortu-  
“ natus, Novatus et Gordius, solus rescribere nihil potui ;  
“ quando a primordio episcopatus mei statuerim, nihil sine  
“ consilio vestro, et sinu consensu plebis, mea privatim sen-  
“ tentia gerere.” Now, as it is impossible from the Epistle to discover the particular nature of the business of which Cyprian speaks, it seems unfair in King to build upon the expressions which he employs respecting it, a conclusion so general, as that, in *every* business, nothing was done by Cyprian without previously obtaining the consent of the people. Gulartius and Junius, whose authority unquestionably as judges of the constitution of the primitive church stands very high, inform us, in their Notes on this passage, that Cyprian probably refers to an ordination, and that all that he says is merely that he never did any thing *of that kind* without the advice of his fellow-presbyters, and the consent of the people. “ Nempe agebatur de aliqua electi-  
“ one quam Cypriano quidem e Presbyterio suggesserant,  
“ eo quod ecclesia ex persecutionibus, parte sui Presbyterii  
“ destituta esset. Respondet nihil se in hac causa unquam  
“ facere voluisse quin et Presbyterii consilium et plebis con-

“ *sensum adhiberet.*” But what though the people are here declared by Cyprian (and the supposition is as natural as any which can be adopted) to have a right to be consulted, as to their opinion and consent, before a minister is ordained ; and what though it is asserted by this father, that he did nothing of *this* kind without thus consulting them ; will that demonstrate, as King very roundly affirms, (p. 106), “ that *all things* relating to the government and policy of “ the church were performed by the joint consent and administration of the clergy and people.”

The assertion of King, (p. 121), that Cyprian writes, that “ whoever was excommunicated, it was by *the divine suffrages of the people,*” (Epist. xl. ad Plebem.), seems to be equally rash and unfounded. Cyprian indeed speaks of the separation of five schismatic presbyters from the church of Carthage, who, attaching themselves to the faction of Felicissimus, had opposed the ministry of this venerable father, and even questioned his right to discharge his function. So far, however, is Cyprian from affirming that these Presbyters had been excommunicated by the votes of the people, that he tells us expressly *they were excommunicated by none*, neither *people* nor *office-bearers*, but had voluntarily inflicted upon themselves the punishment which they deserved, and *expelled themselves* from the communion of the church.— “ Et quidem de Dei providentia, (says he, p. 58), nobis “ hoc nec volentibus nec optantibus, immo et ignoscentibus “ et tacentibus, pœnas quas meruerant rependerunt, ut a “ nobis non ejecti ultro se ejicerent, ipsi in se pro conscientia sua sententiam darent, secundum vestra divina suffragia conjurati et scelerati de ecclesia sponte se pellerent.” Mention is indeed made of the votes of the people ; and it is intimated, that these persons were *conjurati et scelerati*, or wicked men and conspirators, according to their votes.— It does not appear, however, that these votes had been given by an assembly of the people met judicially, as ecclesiastical governors, to consider their conduct. Had such an assembly been called, and such a sentence pronounced, it is difficult to conceive how these men would have been permitted to remain in the communion of the church, and to officiate as ministers. Such a determination, if pronounced by the members together with their office-bearers, as those who were over these presbyters in the Lord, necessarily involved in it an exclusion at once from their privileges as members, and

their function as ministers; and since no such punishment was inflicted upon them, though they were declared by these votes to be wicked and conspirators, it is most probable that the votes were not delivered by the people as an assembly of ecclesiastical arbiters convened to judge and punish these offenders, but as met in a different character, and for a different purpose. But in what character, it may be asked, had the people met when they delivered these votes, and for what purpose was it requisite that they should vote at all? We answer, that these favourers of Felicissimus had endeavoured to alienate the minds of his congregation from the ministry of Cyprian, and had prompted them publicly to reject his authority, and no longer acknowledge him as a Christian bishop. “Hi (says that father) fomenta  
 “olim quibusdam confessoribus et hortamenta tribuebant,  
 “ne *concordarent cum episcopo suo*, nec ecclesiasticam  
 “disciplinam cum fide et quiete juxta præcepta Dominica  
 “continere, ne confessionis suæ gloriam incorrupta et im-  
 “maculata conversatione servarent.” And again, “Ac ne  
 “parum fuisset corrupisse quorundam confessorum mentes,  
 “et *contra sacerdotium Dei* portionem ruptæ fraternitatis  
 “armare voluisse.” In consequence, however, of the attempts of these men to mislead and seduce them, it is likely that the people would assemble in a body, to consider whether they would adhere to the ministry of their pastor, or connect themselves with the friends and followers of Felicissimus. On this occasion a vote would be taken, and the decision being in favour of Cyprian, they necessarily declared the opposite party to be *conjurati et scelerati*, “wicked  
 “men and conspirators.” Still, however, in the whole of this proceeding, they did not act as the ecclesiastical judges and overseers of these presbyters, and much less, as King has ventured to affirm, did they excommunicate them by their votes. Even after the determination which was made by the votes of the members, when met in a private capacity, they still retained their function as elders; and consequently no argument can be drawn from this passage, to shew that when offenders were judicially expelled from the ancient church, it was by the votes of the members as well as of the office-bearers.

Even though it were conceded that the members of the church were allowed, for their satisfaction, to be present at the deliberations of the ministers and office-bearers, and were



occasionally perhaps admitted to express their concurrence, it does not appear that every thing was submitted to their judgment and vote, as well as to the judgment and vote of the overseers, before it was finally adopted. On the contrary, it is declared by Clemens Romanus, one of the earliest fathers, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, who had rebelled against their office-bearers, that the government of the church was vested in the latter. "Let us, my brethren," says he, "look to soldiers who fight under their officers. With what regularity, meekness, and submission, they execute their orders. All are not pretors, nor rulers of thousands, or of hundreds, fifties, or smaller companies : but every one, in his own rank, does what is commanded by the king and the rulers. The high cannot subsist without the low, nor the low without the high : There is a certain variety, and it proves beneficial.

"Ye then," adds he, "who have laid the foundation of this insurrection, return to the obedience of your presbyters, and bending the knees of your heart, be instructed to repentance. Laying aside the haughty arrogance of your tongues, learn *subjection* : for it is better with a good reputation to be esteemed little in the flock of Christ, than appearing more eminent in our own eyes, to be deprived of that hope which "he hath given us \*." If every member, however, in the church of Christ, according to the opinion of this ancient father, was no more to be a ruler than every soldier in an army was to be a pretor, or commander of thousands, or hundreds, or fifties, or tens, in his view must it not have been in the highest degree reprehensible to grant to the people an equality of power with their ministers or office-bearers, the point of presidency alone excepted ? And if he enjoins the whole of the members to be subject to their ministers with the same *meekness and submission* which are discovered by *soldiers* to those who are *their officers*, is it not obvious that in his time, or in his church at least, every measure must not have been submitted to their vote as much as to that of the office-bearers ?—Here then seems to be one pointed and decisive testimony from a father, whose antiquity and high respectability entitle him unquestionably to the greatest regard, completely contradictory to the assertions of Independents. In his days

\* See Mr. Robertson's Reply to Mr. Ewing's Animadversions on his Attack upon Lay-preaching, p. 21, and 23.

undoubtedly (and he lived immediately after the apostles of Christ) the people cannot have enjoyed the same authority in ecclesiastical government as their pastors and elders, or his reasoning would have been inapposite and inconclusive. Nay, had they possessed such power in all other congregations, though refused it in his, his argument would still have been weak and nugatory ; for it might have been replied by the Corinthians, that though the members of his church were obliged to be subject to their spiritual overseers as soldiers are to their officers, yet the appointment of Christ, and the practice of every other primitive church, warranted them to claim an equality of power, in judging and voting upon every measure, with their ministers and elders. But as we cannot suppose that such an argument would have been used by Clemens, had he known that this universally was the constitution of the church, it naturally follows, that at that period at least, the people must have been strangers to that degree of power which Independents contend should now be granted to them in ecclesiastical government.

Jerome also, who was not long posterior to Clemens, exhibits a testimony no less strong and explicit against Independency, in his remarks upon Titus, chap. i. “Antequam” (says he) *diaboli instinctu, studia in religione fierent, et diceretur in populo, ego sum Pauli, ego Apollo, ego vero Cephæ, communi presbyterorum consilio ecclesiæ gubernabantur,*” &c. *i. e.* “Before, through the suggestion of the devil, factions arose in religion, and it was said among the people, I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas, the churches *were governed* by a common council of presbyters.” Upon which the learned Chanier, in his *Treatise de Œcumen. Pontif. Lib. x. cap. v. sect. xxii*, in reply to Bellarmine, remarks, “Respondeo ad primum etiamsi aristocratia non sit totidem syllabis nominata, tamen certo significatam his verbis communi presbyterorum consilio ecclesiæ gubernabantur,” &c. And subjoins, “Bonam autem fuisse id regiminis formam, inde sequitur, quod *ab initio* fuisse dicat (Hieronymus) cum in ecclesia id sit optimum quod verissimum, id autem verissimum quod *primum* :—Dicet enim (Hieron.) fuisse *ex institutionis Dominicæ* veritate.’” But if, as is justly observed by Chanier, we are instructed by this father, that *in the apostolic times, and in the ages which immediately succeeded that period*, the churches were governed, agree-

ably to the injunction of Christ himself, by a council of presbyters, is it not obvious that originally the people cannot have been admitted to parity of power, in every congregation, with their elders and office-bearers? Had it universally been the practice of the New Testament churches, and of the congregations at large in every country which were afterwards formed, to allow their members to judge and vote upon every cause; nay, as the members were more numerous, had it generally been known that every Christian society was more really governed by the former than by the latter; how could Jerome err so egregiously in a matter of fact, and assert, in opposition to the knowledge of all, and at the risk of instant and universal contradiction, that, till factions had begun to arise in the church, every congregation was governed by a council of elders? It would appear then, from this clear and striking declaration of one who, from antiquity and superior information, was eminently qualified to judge upon this subject, that, in the apostolic times as well as in subsequent ages, the people were not permitted to vote and determine in ecclesiastical matters, but that the churches were administered, as at present among Presbyterians, by a council of office-bearers.

To these quotations might be added the words of Ignatius, an apostolic father, (Epist. ad Trallianos, edit. Oxen. p. 66), who calls the presbyters or elders of his times, the *συνεδριον Θεου*, or the sanhedrin or council of God: “*Οι δε πρεσβυτεροι ως συνεδριον Θεου,*” &c. But upon what ground could he distinguish them by the name of the sanhedrin, the common appellation of the Jewish ecclesiastical judicial court, if they did not constitute a corresponding court in the Christian church? With this, too, might be mentioned the words of Origen, who, in his Seventh Homily upon Joshua, orders “one who had been thrice admonished, and was  
 “unwilling to repent, to be cut off from the church by its  
 “presidents or elders:—Tertio admonitum resipiscere non  
 “lentem jubet ab ecclesiæ corpore desecari, per ecclesiæ  
 “præsides.” And to this might be subjoined the declaration of the authors of the Magdeburgen. Centuriæ, a work of the highest credit and authority for its accurate representations of ecclesiastical antiquity: “Jus (say they, Cent. iii. cap. vii. p. 151), tractandi de excommunicandis, aut recipiendis publice lapsis, penes seniores ecclesiæ erat;”  
 i. e. “The right of deciding respecting such as were to be

“ excommunicated, or of receiving, upon their repentance,  
 “ such as had fallen from the profession of Christianity, was  
 “ vested in the elders of the church :” and, in proof of this  
 they refer us to Tertullian’s Apology. They indeed remark,  
 (Cent. ii. cap. vii. p. 134), “ Ceterim si quis probatos au-  
 “ tores hujus seculi perspiciat, videbit formam gubernatio-  
 “ nis propemodum Δημοκρατίας similem fuisse ;” but in the  
 following words, they sufficiently explain their meaning :—  
 “ Singulæ enim ecclesiæ (say they), *parem* habebant *potes-*  
 “ *tatem* verbum Dei pure docendi, sacramenta administran-  
 “ di, absolvendi et excommunicandi hæreticos et sceleratos,  
 “ et ceremonias ab apostolis acceptas exercendi, aut etiam  
 “ pro ratione ædificationis novas condendi, ministros eligen-  
 “ di, vocandi, ordinandi, et justissimas ob causas iterum de-  
 “ ponendi.” From this it is evident, that though, in the  
 former sentence, they had said that the government of the  
 Christian church, in the second century, was almost like a  
 democracy, they intended only that it resembled it in this  
 individual circumstance, that all its congregations had an  
 equality of power ; and, as Wood observes, p. 383, “ that  
 “ no particular church was to have any authoritative and  
 “ juridical superioritie over other particular churches, as the  
 “ Prelaticall men pleaded for authoritative superioritie in  
 “ their cathedrall churches, over all particular churches in  
 “ the diæcese, and the Papalins for an universall superioritie  
 “ and supremacie in the church of Rome, over all other  
 “ churches in the world.” “ Besides,” as he adds, “ it is  
 “ to be observed that among other things which they rec-  
 “ kon up as parts of the church-government, which they  
 “ say was much like democracie, they put in the preaching  
 “ of the word, and administration of sacraments, which  
 “ themselves before say (and no man of sound judgment  
 “ will deny) are acts proper to the called ministers of Christ :  
 “ Whence also, it is manifest that they mean not a demo-  
 “ cracie properly so called, which putteth the formall  
 “ power and exercise of government in the hands of all and  
 “ every one of the multitude, which the Independent bre-  
 “ thren plead for.”

On the whole, even Cyprian, whom Independents have so  
 frequently represented as affirming that the government of  
 the church was purely popular, uses expressions by no means  
 consistent with such a supposition. He tells us for instance,  
 in his Epistle to Quintus, de Hæreticis Baptizandis, p. 140,

that the persons who “governed the church of the Lord in the province of Africa and Numidia, at the period to which he refers, were Agrippinus, a man of worthy memory, and his fellow bishops or ministers. Quod quidem et Agrippinus, bonæ memoriæ vir, cum cæteris coepiscopis ejus, qui illo tempore in provincia Africæ et Numidiæ ecclesiam Domini gubernabant, statuit, et librato consilii communis examine firmavit.” That the power of ordination also, that most important act of ecclesiastical government, was intrusted only with the ministers, in the days of this father, is no less evident. In his Fifty-second Epistle, for example, while he says that Cornelius was chosen to be a bishop by the vote of the people, he declares most expressly, that he was ordained only by the ministers or clergy. “Et factus est, (says he, p. 75), episcopus a plurimis collegis nostris qui tunc in urbe Roma aderant qui ad nos literas honorificas, et laudabiles, et testimonio suæ prædicationis illustres de ejus ordinatione miserunt. Factus est autem Cornelius episcopus de Dei et Christi ejus judicio, de clericorum pene omnium testimonio, de plebis, quæ tunc affuit suffragio, et de sacerdotum et bonorum virorum collegio \* ;” *i. e.* in substance, “He was made a bishop by many of my colleagues who were then in Rome, according to the judgment of God and Christ, the testimony of almost all the clergymen (who belonged to that church), the vote of the people who were present, and the college of ancient priests and worthy men.” And he says of Novatian, (p. 81), that “he was made a bishop by sixteen of his fellow ministers or bishops.” “Nisi si episcopus tibi videtur, qui episcopo in ecclesia a sedecini coepiscopis facto, adulteratque extraneus episcopus fieri

\* See also Epist. lxxv. p. 159, “Sed et cæteri quique hæretici, si se ab ecclesia Dei sciderint, nihil habere potestatis aut gratiæ possunt, quando omnis potestas et gratia in ecclesia constituta sit, ubi præsident majores natu, qui et baptizandi et manum imponendi et ordinandi possident potestatem ;” *i. e.* “But the other heretics also, if they separate from the church, can have no power or grace, since all power and grace are placed in the church, where elders preside, in whom is vested the power of baptizing, and imposition of hands, and ordination.” And it is obvious that these elders must have been the ministers of the church, and not merely laymen advanced in age, for they are said also to baptize as well as ordain, and none we know could perform that act, but such as were recognized as office-bearers or presbyters.



“ a desertoribus per ambitum nititur.” Not only, moreover, were they the only persons who communicated ordination, but they alone determined every thing relating to the conduct and duties of the clergy after they had been invested with their office. Hence Cyprian, in his Sixty-sixth Epistle, p. 126, reprobates one Victor, because, in opposition to the decrees of a council of ministers, he had appointed Faustinus, a presbyter of the church, one of the trustees of his testament. “ Graviter commoti sumus ego  
 “ et collegæ mei qui præsentés aderant, et compresbyteri  
 “ nostri qui nobis assidebant, fratres charissimi, cum cog-  
 “ novissemus quod Geminus Victor, frater noster de seculo  
 “ excedens, Geminium Faustinum presbyterum tutorem tes-  
 “ tamento suo nominaverit, cum jam pridem *in concilio epis-*  
 “ *coporum statutum sit*, ne quis de clericis et Dei ministris  
 “ tutorem vel curatorem testamento suo constituat—quando  
 “ singuli divino sacerdotio honorati, et in clerico ministerio  
 “ constituti, non nisi altari et sacrificiis deservire, et preci-  
 “ bus atque orationibus vacare debeant.” And again,  
 “ Quod episcopi antecessores nostri, religiose considerantes,  
 “ et salubriter providentes, censuerunt ne quis frater exce-  
 “ dens ad tutelam vel curam clericum nominaret; ac si quis  
 “ hoc fecisset, non offerretur pro eo, nec sacrificium pro  
 “ dormitione ejus celebraretur.” But if an assembly of mi-  
 nisters alone decided in this instance of clerical duty, and even,  
 as is asserted in these passages, appointed a precise and par-  
 ticular punishment to be inflicted upon any one who disre-  
 garded their decree, is it not obvious that in all other points  
 which respected the conduct of the office-bearers of the  
 church, it must have been they alone who were permitted  
 authoritatively to judge and determine. In short, we find  
 that when a minister acted unworthily of his office, it was  
 ministers alone who were authorised to be his judges. Thus,  
 when Novatian, after his apostasy, entreated to be admitted  
 into the communion of the different churches of Africa, the  
 persons who decided upon the propriety or impropriety of  
 granting his request, we are told by Cyprian, (Epist. lxxvii.  
 127), were a council or assembly of ministers. “ Et cum  
 “ (says he) ad nos in Africum legatos misisset, optans ad  
 “ communicationem nostram admitti, hinc a concilio pluri-  
 “ morum sacerdotum qui præsentés eramus sententiam retu-  
 “ lerit;” *i. e.* “ And when he sent deputies to us to Africa,  
 “ desiring to be received into our communion, he carried

“ back, from a council of many ministers who were present, “ this sentence or determination.” Thus, too, he informs us, in the same Epistle, p. 129, that the persons who judged in the case of Marcian, when he also apostatized, were the office-bearers alone. “ Ex quibus cum Marcianus esse “ cœperit, et ce Novatiano conjungens, adversarius miseri- “ cordiæ et pietatis extiterit : sententiam non dicat, sed acci- “ piat, nec sic agat quasi ipse *judicaverit de collegio sacer- “ dotum*, quando ipse sit ab universis sacerdotibus judica- “ tus.” Thus, likewise, Privatus, an old heretic, was tried and condemned by a council consisting of ninety ministers, which met for the purpose in the Lambesitanian colony ; and was also denied admission into the Christian fellowship of the African churches by a similar council, which was afterwards convened, to decide upon an application which was made by him to that end. “ Per Felicianum autem (says “ he, p. 92), significavi tibi, frater venisse Carthaginem “ Privatum veterim hæreticum, in Lambesitana colonia, “ ante multos fere annos, ob multa et gravia delicta nona- “ ginta episcoporum sententia condemnatum, antecessorum “ etiam nostrorum, quod et vestram conscientiam non latet, “ Fabiani et Donati literis severissime notatum, qui cum “ causam suam apud nos in concilio, quod habuimus idibus “ Maiis, quæ proxime fuerunt, agere velle se diceret, nec “ admissus esset, fortunatum istum sibi pseudoepiscopum “ dignum collegio suo fecit \*.”

As it was by ministers alone that ministers were judged

\* It has indeed been asserted by King, p. 105, “ That the same “ mode was observed in the deposition of a bishop as in his elec- “ tion. As a bishop was elected by the people over whom he was “ to preside, and by the neighbouring bishops, so was he deposed “ by the same ; both which things seem to be intimated in that “ passage of the forementioned Epistle, (Epist. lxxviii), wherein it “ is said, that the people chiefly has power, either to choose wor- “ thy bishops, or to refuse unworthy ones.” But upon this it may be remarked, that in the passage referred to Cyprian is not speaking of the degree of authority which the people should have in the deposition of bishops compared with that of the ministers of the church, but simply shewing that it is lawful for them to separate from such bishops. This he demonstrates by various commands and examples adduced from the scriptures ; and then subjoins, “ Propter quod plebs obsequens præceptis Dominicis, et Deum ti- “ mens, a peccatore præposito *separare se debet*, nec se ad sacrilegi “ sacerdotis sacrificia miscere ; quando ipsa maxime habeat potes- “ tatem vel eligendi dignos sacerdotes, vel indignos recusandi ;” i. e. “ in substance, “ Wherefore the people, obedient to the com-

and condemned, if guilty, so it was by ministers alone that they were afterwards received, on evidences of their repentance, into the communion of the church. This is manifest from what is mentioned by Cyprian, (Epist. lii. p. 76), respecting Trophimus, who had separated from the church, but afterwards, upon his penitence, was publicly re-admitted. “*Nam sicut antecessores nostri (says he) sæpe fecerunt, colligendis fratribus nostris, charissimus frater noster Cornelius necessitati succubuit : et quoniam cum Trophimo pars maxima plebis abscesserat, redeunte nunc ad ecclesiam Trophimo, et satisfaciente, et pœnitentia deprecationis errorem pristinum consistente et fraternitatem, quam nuper abstraxerat, cum plena humilitate et satisfactione revocante, auditæ sunt ejus preces ; et in ecclesiam Domini non tam Trophimus, quam maximus fratrum numerus, qui cum Trophimo fuerat admissus est : qui omnes regressuri ad ecclesiam non essent, nisi cum Trophimo comitante venissent.*” The persons who re-admitted not merely Trophimus, but a great number of the people who had seceded along with him, and now repented of their error, were an assembly composed of the colleagues of Cyprian and Cornelius his fellow-bishop. “*Tractatu illic cum collegis plurimis habito susceptus est Trophimus ;*” *i. e.* “A deliberation being held there, with many of our colleagues, Trophimus was received,” And that it was the same persons alone who were invested with a power judicially to pardon and punish the sins of transgressors in general in the Christian church, seems to be no less clear from his Epistle to Jubaianus, p. 145. “*Nam Petro (says he) primum Dominus, super quem ædificavit ecclesiam, et unde uni-*

“mandments of the Lord, and fearing God, ought to separate themselves from the wicked office-bearer, especially as they have the power of choosing worthy bishops, or of refusing unworthy ones.” And as the people are here said to have had the power of choosing a worthy minister, or refusing an unworthy one, and not to have had more power for this purpose, as King translates the words, than the governors of the church, it appears no less manifest from other passages, that Cyprian cannot be supposed to assert in this passage, that the people were allowed to sit in any court which met to deliberate on the deposition of a bishop. As it is evident that a bishop, when elected by them, was ordained solely by the ministers of the church, so it is no less obvious from the instances which have been mentioned, that though they have a power also of separating from an unworthy overseer, it is intended to be intimated, that this is only to take place after he has been previously judged by an assembly composed of the office-bearers.

“ tatis originem instituit, et ostendit : potestatem istam dedit, ut id solveretur in cœlis, quod ille solvisset in terris. Et post resurrectionem quoque ad apostolos loquitur dicens : Sicut misit me pater, et ego mitto vos : Hoc cum dixisset, inspiravit, et ait illis : Accipite Spiritum sanctum : Si cujus remiseritis peccata, remittentur illi : Si cujus tenueritis tenebuntur.” That is, “ For the Lord gave to Peter, and afterwards to his apostles, this power, that what they bound on earth should be bound in heaven, and what they loosed on earth should be loosed in heaven.” “ Whence,” he adds, “ we understand that it is lawful for none but the *office-bearers* of the church to baptize, and grant remission of sins. Unde intelligimus non nisi in ecclesia *præpositis*, et in evangelica lege, ac Dominica ordinatione fundatis licere baptizare, et remissam peccatorum dare.” If it was his opinion, however, that none but the office-bearers, or the *præpositi in ecclesia*, could bind and loose in general, and grant a declaration of the remission of sins at baptism in particular, is it not obvious that it must have been they alone who, in his view, were intrusted with the government of the church? Had every member enjoyed an equality of power with the ministers, to bind and loose, to pardon and punish offenders in general, can we suppose that Cyprian would have inferred from these words of Christ, that this authority was lawful to none but “ the elders, or *præpositi* ?”

Let it not be objected, that, in the following page, the church at large is said by him to possess all the power of her Spouse and Lord : “ Hæc est una quæ tenet et possidet omnem Sponsi sui et Domini potestatem.” As it could not be concluded from this, in opposition to innumerable passages in his writings, that it was his opinion that every member had power to baptize as well as the pastor, so it can no more be concluded from it, in opposition to expressions no less pointed and determinate, that every member was entitled to be a virtual though not a nominal ruler. He as expressly says, that it is lawful to none but the ministers, or *præpositi*, to bind or loose, because it was to them alone that Christ committed this authority when he addressed his apostles after his resurrection, (John xx. 21, 22, 23,) as he declares in any passage, that it is lawful for them alone to administer the sacraments. His meaning, therefore, in this sentence must be, that though the whole power of Christ

was given to the church to be exercised by her ministers, yet it was not to be exercised by every individual of her members in particular. Nor let it be urged, that, from different Epistles, it appears that the people were not only allowed to be present at public deliberations, but even to speak and vote. It has been the mind of some very learned and respectable Presbyterians, that, in extraordinary cases, laymen were allowed to sit in these courts and deliver their advice, and express their concurrence. It was not however the members indiscriminately who obtained this privilege, according to these writers, but, while the rest were permitted to be present as auditors, it was the learned and intelligent only, who had been invited to the performance of this special duty, that were allowed to sit as counsellors in the assembly. “Eorum (says Junius, Cont. iii. lib. ii. cap. xxv. n. 2), qui conciliis intersunt, varia esse genera: Esse audientes qui in doctrina et ordine ex auditione informantur: esse doctos, qui ad consultationem adhibentur: esse denique episcopos et presbyteros, qui decidunt res ferendis sentiis:” *i. e.* “Of those who are present in councils, there are various descriptions of persons: Some are hearers, and are instructed in the doctrine and order of the church: some are learned, and are admitted as counsellors; and some are bishops and presbyters, who, delivering their opinions upon the subjects which they examine, pronounce the decisions.” And again, (Cont. iv. lib. i. cap. xv. n. 15), he says, “Qui sine auctoritate ecclesiæ adsunt, eorum alii etiam consultationibus adhiberi possunt, ut docti, præsertim ecclesiastici, sed dicere sententiam definitivam non possunt;” *i. e.* “Of those who are present without the authority of the church, some who are learned, and especially ecclesiastics, may be admitted to the consultations, but they cannot pronounce a definitive sentence.” Whether this representation however be correct or not, it seems plain that even admitting that the people, in some instances, might be allowed to speak, it could be only as advisers; and even granting that sometimes they were permitted to vote, it could be only to shew their concurrence, or simply as an expression of their sentiments, for, after all, the power of decision appears still to have belonged to the office-bearers alone. Cyprian mentions, (Epist. lv. p. 96), two different instances, in which when the people had opposed the restoration of some who had formerly apostatized, but afterwards



exhibited evidences of repentance, to the communion of the church, he had himself received them. “Unus (says he) atque alius, obtinente plebe, et contradicente, mea tamen facilitate suscepti, pejores extiterunt, quam prius fuerant, nec fidem pœnitentiæ servare potuerunt, quia nec cum vera pœnitentia venerant;” *i. e.* “One and another, who had been admitted by my indulgence, though the people opposed it, turned out worse than they were before, because they had come again into the church without true repentance.” This, however, would have been impossible, had the people, who were unquestionably more numerous than Cyprian and his fellow-ministers, possessed an equality of ecclesiastical power with him and his brethren in deciding upon this and other matters. Besides, had this been the case, how could he affirm, as we formerly saw, that the persons who governed the Numidian churches were the ministers, since if the people were allowed any higher power than that of occasionally delivering their opinion and expressing their concurrence, either by voting or otherwise, it was more really they who administered these churches than the ministers and office-bearers? And how, especially upon the contrary supposition, could he represent it as lawful for none but the *præpositi in ecclesia*, or the ministers of the church, to bind and loose, or remit and punish sin, since if every member had a power of final judicial determination no less than the office-bearers, they would exercise this authority as well as their ministers, nay, on account of their number, would much more really have possessed it? Whatever occasional liberties then, for the sake of peace, might be granted to the people, to speak and vote in the congregations which were placed under the inspection of Cyprian, it is plain that it must have been only to express their acquiescence in the decisions of their office-bearers, and by no means implied that degree of power in ecclesiastical government for which Independents contend. He too, as well as Clemens, Ignatius, Jerome, Tertullian, and Origen, affirms, as we have seen, that it is the office-bearers alone who govern the church; and at the same time, by a great variety of expressions, clearly intimates that every measure was not then subjected to the votes of the members, and, by their decision, adopted or set aside.

From these, then, and other testimonies, it is contended that the constitution of the primitive church, after the days

of the apostles, resembled the Presbyterian and not the Independent scheme. It is again requested however, that it may be carefully remarked that no argument is deduced from it for the truth of Presbytery. Many errors existed, even in the earliest times, in the primitive church, and it is only as far as their principles and practice are sanctioned by scripture, that we are warranted either to admit or to imitate them.

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## LETTER IX.

SIR,

IF the government of the church is to be committed only to a few, it comes next to be considered who are these few? Are they the ministers alone, who feed the flock with knowledge and understanding, or have we reason to believe that there are *other* elders associated with them, who are simply to rule and not to preach? The last is the opinion of Presbyterians; and though it is in general denied by most of the present classes of Independents, was admitted by many of their most respectable predecessors. Dr. Watts affirms, (p. 125 of his Treatise on the Foundation of the Christian Church), "that if it happens that there is but one minister or presbyter in a church, or if the ministers are young men of small experience in the world, it is *useful* and *proper* that some of the eldest, gravest, and wisest members be deputed by the church to join with and assist the ministers in the care and management of this affair (the admission and exclusion of members.)" Mr. Thomas Goodwin, in his Catechism on Church Government, p. 19, expressly asserts, that there is a class of elders who are to rule and not to teach. Mr. John Cotton also, in his Way of the Churches of Christ in New England, chap. ii. sect. ii. p 13—35, contends that such elders are a divine institution, and represents it as very generally obtaining in these churches. The Westminster Independents, moreover, in their Reasons against the Third Proposition concerning Presbyterian Government, p. 40, declare, "that the scripture says *much* of two sorts of elders, *teaching* and *ruling*, and in some places, so *plaine*, as if of purpose to distinguish them;"

and, (p. 3), "that the whole Reformed churches had these "different elders." And it cannot be denied that never was there a more strenuous or enlightened advocate for this order of elders than the great Dr. Owen, who may justly be considered as the most learned of Independents\*. Venerable, however, as such names are, I hope it will appear that it rests not merely on their opinion and authority, but on the dictates of reason, and the explicit testimony of the word of God.

That the government of the church, then, should be vested not merely in the elders who teach, but in a class of elders who rule and do not teach, conjoined with the former, appears to be evident from the following reasons:—

In the first place, It has been observed by some of your brethren, that it seems to be taught in scripture, that there must be a *plurality* of elders in every church; and from *the maintenance* which is requisite for every teaching elder, it appears obvious that they cannot *all* be elders who teach. That there must be a *plurality* of elders in every church, they tell us, is evident, among other passages, from Acts xiv. 23, where we are told, that "Paul and Barnabas ordained "elders in every church†." The particular number of these elders is not specified, but it appears fit that it should be determined by the number of members. At any rate it is certain, that it can never properly be less than *three*; for if there were only two, and if they should happen to differ upon any point of discipline, or any case of government, no decision could be made. But if, in every church however small, there can never be less than *three* elders, it seems obvious that *all* of them cannot be elders who *teach*. In your own society, as well as your sister-societies, the teaching elders receive a maintenance, which enables them to give themselves *wholly* to their particular function, without intermingling in the business of the world. This indeed is their just prerogative. "Do ye not know," says Paul, (1 Cor. ix. 13, 14), "that they which minister about holy "things, live of the things of the temple? and they which "wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar? Even so "hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the

\* See his book on the Gospel Church.

† See your brother Mr. Ballentine's Observations, p. 90—95, and the Review of these Observations in the Missionary Magazine, which quotes his sentiments with the most decided approbation.

“gospel, should *live* of the gospel.” And though ministers, in extraordinary instances, like the Apostle Paul, may give up with this right, nothing appears plainer than that it is not to be done in ordinary cases. Reason and experience indeed unite in proving, that nothing is better fitted to secure a respectable ministry, than to grant them such a maintenance as will enable them to devote themselves entirely to personal improvement and public duty. But to afford at least to *three* teaching elders such a maintenance, the funds of *scarcely any* church are adequate. If there must be a *plurality* of elders in every church however small, and if that plurality, in every case of government, cannot be less than *three*, it appears naturally to follow that they cannot *all* be teachers, for all cannot be maintained. There must of consequence in every church, not only be an elder who teaches as well as rules, and who, as he gives himself *wholly* to the duties of his profession, is entitled to maintenance from that society, but elders also, whose maintenance, if required, since they are allowed to attach themselves likewise to secular employments, is not so great, and more consistent with the funds and abilities of the church.

Secondly, The extent of that inspection and superintendence which are required from the rulers of the church over the members, seems to suggest the necessity of a class of elders who are not to teach, but to have this peculiar province assigned them.

Not only is it the duty of the elders of the church to make known, by preaching, their privileges and duties to the Christian members, but a class of office-bearers is required for government and inspection, if possible, still more varied and extensive. It is they alone, we have seen, who are to admit and exclude members, and attend to all those laborious investigations which are often connected with the performance at least of the last of these acts. It is they alone who are to judge in matters of government, and to determine on every point of difficulty and importance, according to the rules before explained; as well as to regulate, according to Dr. Owen, (p. 290), the external concerns of the church of Christ, and appoint seasons for extraordinary duties. Besides this, the Doctor remarks, (p. 292), that they are bound,

“In the 1st place, To watch diligently over the ways, walking, and conversation of all the members of the

“ church ; to see that it be blameless, without offence,  
 “ useful, exemplary, and in all things answering the holiness  
 “ of the commands of Christ, the honour of the gospel, and  
 “ profession which in the world they make thereof. And  
 “ upon the observation which they so make, in the watch  
 “ wherein they are placed, to instruct, admonish, charge,  
 “ exhort, encourage, comfort, as they see cause. And this  
 “ they are to attend unto with courage and diligence.

“ They are, 2dly, To watch against all risings or ap-  
 “ pearances of such differences and divisions on the account  
 “ of things ecclesiastical or civil, as unto their names, rights,  
 “ and proprieties in the world, that are contrary unto that  
 “ love which the Lord Jesus requireth in a peculiar and emin-  
 “ ent manner to be found amongst his disciples.—The due  
 “ observance of this law of love in itself and all its fruits  
 “ with the prevention, removal, or condemnation of all that  
 “ is contrary unto it, is that in which the rule of the church  
 “ doth principally consist. And considering the weakness,  
 “ the passions, the temptations of men, the mutual provoca-  
 “ tions and exasperations that are apt to fall out even among  
 “ the best, the influence that earthly occasions are apt to  
 “ have upon their minds, the frowardness sometimes of men’s  
 “ natural tempers ; the attendance unto this one duty or  
 “ part of rule, requires the utmost diligence of them that  
 “ are called unto it. And it is merely either the want of  
 “ acquaintance with the nature of that law and its fruits,  
 “ which the Lord Christ requires among his disciples, or an  
 “ undervaluation of the worth and glory of it in the church ;  
 “ or inadvertency unto the causes of its decays, and of  
 “ breaches made in it, or ignorance of the care and duties  
 “ that are necessary to its preservation, that induce men to  
 “ judge that the work of an *especial office* is not required  
 “ hereunto.

“ In the 3d place, Their duty is to warn all the members  
 “ of the church of their *especial church-duties*, that they  
 “ may not be found negligent or wanting in them. There  
 “ are *especial duties* required respectively of all church-  
 “ members, according unto the distinct talents, whether in  
 “ things spiritual or temporal, which they have received.  
 “ Some are rich, and some are poor ; some are old, and  
 “ some are young ; some in peace, some in trouble ; some  
 “ have received more spiritual gifts than others, and have  
 “ more opportunities for their exercise. It belongs unto



“ the rule of the church, that all be admonished, instructed,  
 “ and exhorted to attend unto their respective duties ; not  
 “ only publicly in the preaching of the word, but *personally*,  
 “ as occasion doth require, according to the observation  
 “ which those in rule do make of their forwardness or re-  
 “ missness in them.

“ 4thly, They are to watch against the beginning of any  
 “ church-disorders, such as those that infested the church  
 “ of Corinth, or any of the like sort ; with remissness as  
 “ unto the assemblies of the church, and the duties of them,  
 “ which some are subject unto, as the apostle intimates,  
 “ Heb. x. 25. On the constancy and diligence of the elders  
 “ in this part of their work and duty, the very being and  
 “ order of the church do greatly depend. The want hereof  
 “ hath opened a door unto all the troubles, divisions, and  
 “ schisms, that in all ages have invaded and perplexed the  
 “ churches of Christ from within themselves. And from  
 “ thence also have decays in faith, love, and order, insensibly  
 “ prevailed in many to the dishonour of Christ, and the  
 “ danger of their own souls. First, one grows remiss in at-  
 “ tending unto the assemblies of the church, and then ano-  
 “ ther ; first to one degree, then to another, until the whole  
 “ lump be infected. A diligent watch over these things,  
 “ as to the beginnings of them in all the members of the  
 “ church, will either heal and recover them that offend, or  
 “ it will warn others, and keep the church from being either  
 “ corrupted or defiled : Heb. xiii. 12.

“ In the 5th place, It belongs unto them also to visit the  
 “ sick, especially such as whose inward or outward condi-  
 “ tions do expose them unto more than ordinary trials in  
 “ their sickness ; that is, the poor, the afflicted, the tempt-  
 “ ed in any kind. This in general is a moral duty, a work  
 “ of mercy ; but it is moreover, a peculiar church-duty, by  
 “ virtue of institution. And one end of the institution of  
 “ churches, is that the disciples of Christ may have all that  
 “ spiritual and temporal relief which is needful for them, and  
 “ useful to them in their troubles and distresses. And if  
 “ this duty were diligently attended to by the officers of the  
 “ church, it would add much unto the glory and beauty of  
 “ our order, and be an abiding reserve with relief in the  
 “ minds of them whose outward condition exposeth them to  
 “ straits and sorrows in such a season.

“ 6thly, It belongs to them and their office, to advise  
 “ and give direction unto the deacons of the church, as unto  
 “ the making provision and distribution of the charity of  
 “ the church for the relief of the poor. The office of the  
 “ deacons is principally *executive*, as we shall see afterwards.  
 “ Inquisition into the state of the poor, with all their cir-  
 “ cumstances, with the warning of all the members of the  
 “ church unto liberality for their supply, belongs to the  
 “ elders.

“ In the 7th place, When the state of the church is such,  
 “ through suffering, persecution, and affliction, that the poor  
 “ be multiplied among them, so as that the church itself is  
 “ not able to provide for their relief in a due manner, if any  
 “ supply be sent unto them from the love and bounty of  
 “ other churches, it is to be deposited with these elders,  
 “ and disposed according to their advice, and with that of  
 “ the teachers of the church : Acts xi. 30.

“ And 8thly, It is of great importance to teaching elders  
 “ to be acquainted with their flock, that they may be di-  
 “ rected in their labours. He who makes it not his busi-  
 “ ness to know the state of the church which he ministers  
 “ unto in the word and doctrine, as to their knowledge,  
 “ their judgment and understanding, their temptations and  
 “ occasions, and applies not himself in his ministry to search  
 “ out what is necessary and useful unto their edification ;  
 “ he fights uncertainly in his whole work, as a man beating  
 “ the air. But whereas their obligation to attend unto the  
 “ word and prayer, confines them much unto a retirement  
 “ for the greatest part of their time, they cannot by them-  
 “ selves obtain that acquaintance with the whole flock, but  
 “ that others may greatly assist therein, from their daily in-  
 “ spection, converse, and observation.” After which the  
 Doctor subjoins various other duties ; and then adds, (p. 300),  
 “ It is a vain apprehension to suppose that one or two  
 “ teaching officers in a church, who are obliged to give them-  
 “ selves unto the word and prayer, to labour with all their  
 “ might in the word and doctrine, to preach in and out of  
 “ season ; that is, at all times, on all opportunities as they  
 “ are able, to convince gainsayers by word and writing,  
 “ pleading for the truth ; to assist and guide the conscien-  
 “ ces of all, under their temptations and desertions, with  
 “ sundry other duties, in part spoken to before, should be  
 “ able to take care of, and attend with diligence unto all

“ these things that do evidently belong unto the rule of the church.”

Since such then are the duties incumbent on the rulers, and since, if the church be extensive or greatly scattered, as is frequently the case, it is impossible for one, or two, or even three teaching elders, though the congregation could support them, faithfully and satisfactorily to discharge these duties, it seems necessary that there should be another class of elders to attend to them. In your societies, if I mistake not, these duties are in general committed to the deacons, who assist the pastor in the superintendence of the flock. Such superintendence, however, is no proper part of the office of a deacon considered *as such*, and belongs only to those who are appointed as rulers to watch over the church. And though this inspection and superintendence may in some measure be performed likewise by those who are members, as they may communicate instruction also in a manner suited to their particular stations, yet it is plain, that, like the duty of preaching, they belong properly, in all this extent, to those only who are elders and overseers of the flock. But if such an oversight and superintendence be the duty of the elders, and if it exceed the abilities of those elders who teach, and are enjoined to give themselves *wholly* to their particular calling, does it not follow that there must be an order of elders *distinct* from them, who are to assist them in governing and watching over the flock ?

In the third place, The tendency which in every age, even by the confession of Independents, has been discovered in pastors to assume to themselves an immoderate and unreasonable power over the church of Christ, seems to point out the necessity of a class of elders different from them, who may check these usurpations, and restrain their ambition.

That the ministers of religion, however amiable and venerable their character, are subject to the frailties and imperfections of humanity, and that a desire of undue and extravagant authority has too often been one of these imperfections, is a truth which will scarcely be denied. At the distance of a very few years only from the death of the apostles did this pernicious principle begin to operate, and it gradually produced those assumptions of Episcopacy, and that tyranny of Popery, which so long enslaved the Christian world. And to what cause are we to ascribe the introduction of these evils ? If we attend both to the nature of the

thing, and to the representations of the fathers, who witnessed and deplored them, they were to be attributed in a great measure to the discontinuance of that separate class of rulers who were originally instituted in the Christian church, and whose superintendence restrained the ambition of the pastors. Accordingly, the writer of the Commentaries commonly attributed to Ambrose, in his explication of 1 Tim. v. 1, says, "Wherefore both the synagogue, and afterwards  
 " the church had elders, without whose counsel nothing  
 " was done in the church ; which order by what negligence  
 " it grew into disuse I know not, unless perhaps by the  
 " sloth, or rather by the pride of the teachers, while they  
 " alone wish to appear something." " Unde et synagoga  
 " et postea ecclesia seniores habuit, sine quorum consilio  
 " nihil gerebatur in ecclesia : quod qua negligentia obsole-  
 " verit nescio : nisi forte doctorum desidia, aut magis super-  
 " bia, dum soli volunt aliquid videri." And we know that Calvin, from a conviction of these truths, and from a persuasion of the necessity of such an order of elders to prevent those excesses of tyranny which were practised by the Romish clergy at the period of the Reformation, A. D. 1542\*, revived these rulers in the Christian church. Were such an order again to be discontinued, and the government again intrusted to the ministers alone, is it not evident that the door would be opened for similar tyranny over the heritage

\* Though this order of elders, however, was more generally restored by this illustrious reformer at the period referred to, yet it does not appear that it was entirely abolished even in the darkest times of error and corruption which preceded this era. Bucer at least informs us, in his book entitled, *Scripta duo Adversaria Latomi*, &c. p. 77, that the Bohemian churches, who, "alone almost," to use his expressive words, "*preserved in the world the purity of the doctrine and the vigour of the discipline of Christ*," had this order amongst them. " *Illa certe ratio optima, quam observant fratres Picardi, qui soli prope in orbe, cum puritate doctrinæ, vigorem etiam disciplinæ Christi apud se retinuerunt, quam laudem ut iis tribuamus, et Dominum, qui sic in illis operatur, celebremus, res ipsa cogit, etiamsi fratres illi a præpostere doctis nonnullis contemnantur. Ratio vero quam in hac re observant, hæc est. Præter ministros verbi et sacramentorum habent certum collegium virorum prudentia et gravitate spiritus præcellentium, qui munus obeunt monendi ac corrigendi fratres peccantes, componendi dissidentes, et in causis eorum judicandi. De hujusmodi senioribus scripsit et divus Ambrosius in Epist. i. ad Tim. cap. v. Unde et synagoga,*" &c.

of God? The institution therefore of a separate order to restrain these encroachments, and maintain the rights and liberties of the people, seems absolutely requisite for the welfare of the church.

In answer to this, let it not be remarked, that the power of the clergy is equally bounded by the scheme of Independence, which allows them not to establish any of their measures without the previous judgment and consent of the members. It is plain that the clergy could more readily influence a congregation at large, many of whom are unable to judge, and will be disposed to be partial to the opinion of their pastors, than a few of the wisest and most enlightened of the people, who are no less qualified to judge, perhaps, than the ministers themselves. Besides, it has already been attempted to be proved, that such a power of judgment and consent is not granted to the members, and consequently that such a preservative from the assumptions of the clergy is not to be admitted into the church of Christ.

Fourthly, There are many to be found in the church who, though not fitted to be teaching elders, are eminently qualified to be rulers. Most men have it not in their power to attain that learning, and that facility of expression, which are requisite for the former, while many of them have acquired that experience and sagacity which may fit them for the useful discharge of the latter. Shall the church then, because they are not qualified to be numbered among her instructors, be totally deprived of the benefit of their endowments? No, certainly. Does not Paul, when demonstrating that there are to be *various offices* in the church of Christ, (Rom. xii. 1 Cor. xii. &c.), urge, in proof of it, that he has bestowed upon its members *a variety of gifts* which qualify them for these offices? But since Jesus has bestowed upon many of the members of his church gifts for ruling, while he has not imparted to them gifts for teaching, if there be no office assigned to them for the exercise of these gifts, how can this reasoning be conclusive? I maintain, therefore, that since Jesus has communicated to many members in his church gifts for ruling, and for that alone, and since we are taught to believe that where he imparts gifts, there is a corresponding office, there must in his church be a class of elders who are to rule and not to teach, as there is a class of elders who are appointed to rule as well as to teach.



Is it said, that if this reasoning establish any thing, it establishes too much, for as, according to Independents, *all* the members are fitted to judge, should not they *all* be constituted judges and rulers? It is replied, that to make such an inference is in truth to beg the question, or to take for granted the thing to be proved. It was before evinced; that *the whole of the members* of any congregation are very far from being qualified for such a trust, and consequently, even according to this principle, ought not to be judges. It is certain, besides, that every one who is qualified to perform the office of a *deacon* is not entitled, even among Independents, from his possessing these gifts, to exercise that office, but only so many as have been regularly authorized and appointed by the church, though it would be very surprising if the other duties of a pastor prevented him from fulfilling the office of a deacon, that none of the members should be nominated to assist him. As then it appears that there is to be a diversity of offices in the church of Jesus, corresponding to the diversified gifts of its members, and as there are many of the members who, though eminently qualified for ruling, are not fitted for teaching, it appears necessarily to follow that there must be a class of elders in the church who are to rule and not to teach. As it has, moreover, been proved that every member has not these gifts, of consequence, every member cannot have that authority. And as the mere possession of gifts does not warrant, even upon the principles of Independents, all who have them to execute the office of a deacon and other functions, but that only so many as the general interests of the body require, and as have been appointed to the regular discharge of them, are authorized to fulfil them, so it is no less manifest that all who are distinguished for gifts of ruling are not on this account to be chosen to rule, but only so many as are necessary for the inspection and government of the church.

It is surprising, in short, that the commission of the government to a few of the members who do not teach, but merely rule together with the pastors, should be so displeasing both to Episcopalians and Independents, since something similar exists among themselves. Not only are laymen who do not teach, but barely rule, to be found among the different bodies of Protestants on the continent, and in the high situation even of cardinals and inspectors of the different orders of the clergy in the Romish church, but it is certain that in those churches where Episcopacy is estab-

lished, many rule who are not teachers. Bishop Burnet, in his Funeral Sermon on Archbishop Tillotson, expressly affirms, that a bishop *as such*, though appointed to rule, has *no care of souls*, by preaching, devolved upon him. "In his function," says he, "he was a constant preacher: For though he had *no care of souls upon him*, yet few that had, laboured so painfully as he did." And Dr. South, in his Sermon preached at the Consecration of the Bishop of Rochester, vol. i. p. 209, explicitly asserts, that "a teaching talent is not absolutely necessary in a bishop, nor is of *the vital constitution* of his function. If he have it, it is not to be refused; but if he have it not, it is not much to be desired." And, besides their bishops, we know that they have chancellors, and commissioners, and church-wardens, and other officers, who, though laymen, judge and decide in ecclesiastical matters. Dr. Whitaker moreover, though an Episcopalian, acknowledges that there should be two classes of elders in the church; and Dr. Whitby, as will be shewn, expressly avows himself of the very same sentiments. See also Bishop Jewel's Defence of his Apology, part i. p. 41, where he admits that laymen should judge in the church; and see, too, Willet in his *Controversiæ*, Controv. iii. Quæst. iv. p. 41, where he attempts to prove, by a variety of arguments, that laymen should be allowed to be ecclesiastical judges. With regard to Independents, it is certain that though the multitude be permitted to judge and vote with the pastors, it is a few only of the leading and most active of the members who determine every business. The only difference then between Presbyterians and them seems to be this, that while the government is committed by the former to a class of elders who do not teach, together with the pastors who rule as well as teach, it is intrusted *nominally* by the latter to all the members together with the pastors, but is exercised *in reality* only by a few of them who influence the rest. Now, is it not better to give not only the power but the name of rulers to these few along with the pastor, than, like Independents, to delude the people with the mere name, while the power is necessarily limited to a few? On the whole, as the government must really, from the nature of the thing, be placed in the hands of a few, and as the leading men in a congregation, though perhaps forward and loquacious, are often least fitted to direct their decisions, is not the system

of Presbytery more enlightened and wise? By this means, they are secured from the evils which too often result from the confidence or intrigues of any noisy declaimer; and a court of ecclesiastical judges is obtained; not only more enlightened and judicious than those who frequently possess the ascendancy in popular assemblies, but who, from their knowledge and experience, being more upon *an equality* with each other, are less likely to be exposed to a superior influence, and to unite at once that ability and that independence which are absolutely necessary to the enjoyment of a wise and perfect government.



## LETTER X.

SIR,

SATISFACTORY as may be the considerations which are suggested by reason for the necessity and utility of the institution of a separate order of elders, it is on revelation alone that we rest its authority. There are three passages in particular which appear to assert its truth.

In the first place, Rom. xii. 6, 7, 8. Here it is necessary to remark, that, in the preceding verses, the apostle represents the church of Christ under the metaphor of a body, and affirms that as in the natural body there is a variety of members possessed of different and separate powers, so in this spiritual body there is a diversity of offices, for the exercise of which a diversity of gifts is requisite. "As we have many members in one body," says he, "and all members have not *the same office*, so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." After this, he declares it was the duty of those to whom gifts had been imparted for the exercise of particular offices faithfully to employ them, without vanity or arrogance, (compare ver. 3), in their different functions:—"Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence;

“he that sheweth mercy, with chearfulness.” Now, since in the body of Christ there is a diversity of offices as striking as that of the offices of the different members of the natural body ; and since, as is no less evident from the comparison, the united members of the body of Christ can no more exercise *any* office of *that* body which does not belong to them united, than every member of the human body united can discharge the office of *any particular* member of *that* body ; and since, as is equally plain, there are *some* of the offices of the body of Christ which can be exercised by persons who cannot discharge *any superior* function, as in the human body there are *some offices* which can be performed only by the eye or the ear, while these members cannot discharge *any other* function ; is it not obvious that if it can be proved that ruling is numbered among these offices in the former body, it will not only follow that it cannot be exercised *by all*, as seeing or hearing cannot be performed by all the members of the latter body, but that it can be performed by some who cannot teach, as seeing or hearing can be exercised by members of the latter body which have no other function ?

But that ruling is here mentioned as one of the offices in the church of Christ appears to be undeniable. These offices, as we are informed by Mr. Goodwin and Dr. Guise, are first divided into prophecy\* and ministry : and are again subdivided into those of the exhorter and teacher, comprehended under the former ; and those of the person who gives, of him who rules, and of him who shews mercy, included under the latter. Now, as Paul, when speaking of the offices of the church, after his general arrangement, specifies particularly *him that ruleth*, is it not evident that the office of the elder who rules is a divine institution ? As he introduces it under the head of ministry, which is confessedly different in its other branches (that of the deacon who gave, and that of him who sheweth mercy) from the office-bearers who were appointed, under the head of prophecy, to teach and exhort, is it not obvious that this office must

\* Understanding by prophecy, as Dr. Guyse has proved, (see his Note on the place, and his Second Note on 1 Cor. xiv. 1—5), not the interpretation of scripture, by immediate inspiration, or the foretelling of future events, but the *ordinary preaching* of the ministers of Christ, as his two witnesses are said to *prophesy* during the reign of Antichrist.

be completely distinct from that of teaching, and, like the office of the deacon, which too is included under ministry, may be exercised by those who have neither talents nor authority to preach the gospel? In short, as the gifts for ruling, which Paul here enjoins the governors of the church to exercise with diligence, by the very comparison before mentioned, are no more given to all the members of the church, than the power of seeing or hearing is imparted to all the members of our bodies, is it not manifest that this office of ruling cannot belong to *all the members* indiscriminately? And, in fine, as mere gifts for *preaching*, or *giving*, do not authorise as many as have them to exercise the offices of a *pastor* or a *deacon*, but those only are warranted to do so who have been set apart to these offices, so is it not evident, that when the duty of *ruling* is spoken of, every one is not here called to the performance of this duty, but as many only as have been considered to be requisite to take the oversight of the church, and have been invested with the office of *rulers* for this end? Thus, then, it would appear that there is an office of rule in the church of Christ different from that of the elder who teaches, and that this office is not committed to all indiscriminately, but to as many only of those who are qualified for it, and are necessary for this end, as have been regularly set apart to it by the elders of the church.

In answer to this it has been said, that the apostle is not here speaking of *offices* but of *gifts*, and consequently that it cannot be inferred from what is here said, that there is an office of rule distinct from that of the elder who teaches. But in reply to this it may be observed, that by introducing a comparison between the natural body and the church of Christ, (ver. 4, 5), and asserting that as in the former "there were many members, all of which had not *the same office*," so in the latter there was a variety no less remarkable, he plainly points out a diversity not only of gifts but of offices in the latter, as there was a diversity not only of gifts, but of offices in the former. Though, therefore, it were admitted that the apostle is speaking only of the exercise of *the gifts* of him who ruleth, agreeably to what he says in ver. 6, he evidently supposes that there is *an office* for ruling in which these gifts may be exercised, and an office distinct from that of the teacher, as when he speaks of each of the members of our bodies as exercising those gifts



which are peculiar to *its office*, he ascribes it to an office separate from that of any of the other members. As the apostle, moreover, when he mentions him who *teacheth*, and him who *giveth*, speaks not merely of gifted brethren as exercising the endowments which are requisite for these offices, but of such only as were *ordained* to these particular functions, is it not manifest that when he mentions likewise him who *ruleth*, he must intend not merely *gifted* brethren as governing the church, but those only who are invested with that particular office? Now, if *mere qualifications* for being a pastor or a deacon will not authorize those who possess them to exercise these gifts as *pastors* or *deacons*, till they are set apart to these offices, it appears equally obvious, that though the apostle were allowed here to speak of those who ruled as barely exercising *their gifts* for ruling with diligence, he cannot mean that any were to exercise these gifts for that end, but such as had been ordained to *the office* of ecclesiastical rulers. Investiture therefore with the *office* of ruling is as much requisite to the exercise of rule, as investiture with that of a *pastor* is to teaching, and investiture with that of a *deacon* is to giving. And as this office is *essentially different* from the former, and requires qualifications totally *distinct*, we are warranted to affirm that there must be an office of ruling in the church of Christ *completely different* from that of teaching; an office, for which as *all* have neither gifts nor authority, that cannot be exercised by *all*, and which, as many have endowments for it who are totally unfit for being public teachers, may be exercised by many who cannot be teachers of the church of God.

Still it is objected, that though we hear, in this passage, of him who *ruleth*, it may be only the person's *own family* that is intended. But to this it is answered, that the various duties here mentioned by the apostle as performed by the different persons of whom he speaks, are represented by him as performed to the church only, and consequently that it must be a rule which relates more immediately to the affairs of this society which is designed. It is contended with Doddridge and other Independents, that it is a rule or presidency (as they say that the word means,) which refers merely to the distribution of the charitable collections of the church? This would make him who *ruleth*, the same with the *deacon*, or him who *giveth*, which, in a division

of the different offices of the church, as is here stated, would be extremely inaccurate. It is said, moreover, that the exhorter, who is the same with the teacher, is mentioned apparently as a different office-bearer from him; and him that sheweth mercy, who is the same with the deacon, or him who giveth, as a different office-bearer from him; and why may not the name of him who ruleth be here supposed to be given to the deacon, or him who giveth, in reference to his presidency over the church-stock, though it makes him who ruleth, and him who giveth, the same office-bearer? But even though it were allowed that he who teaches, and he who exhorts, or, as some render it, who reproves and comforts, were the same office-bearer, and that he who giveth, and he who sheweth mercy, were the same minister, it is plain that different branches of their office are referred to. He who teaches men the doctrines and duties of Christianity performs a very different part from him who reproves, or comforts, or exhorts; and he who was appointed by the church to shew mercy in the various ways in which it was manifested in the primitive times to Christian brethren, who were strangers and in distress, certainly performed a very different duty from him who merely gave. If presiding here, however, means presiding over the church-stock, and if he who ruleth be the same with him who giveth, it is employing two expressions, in an enumeration of things which are different, for *the very same part* of the office of the deacon. Besides, it has been the opinion of many most respectable men, both among Presbyterians and Independents, that he who taught, and he who exhorted, were not persons who fulfilled only *different* parts of the *same* office, but persons who discharged *offices entirely distinct*. The former, according to them, was the catechist or teacher, who prepared young persons for personal admission to the privilege of membership, as well as the catechumens who had become converts from idolatry, or who publicly explained the truths of religion without dispensing privileges; the latter was the stated pastor or bishop\*. And with re-

\* See Calvin's Institutes; Beza upon the place; Owen on the Nature of a Gospel-church, chap. vi; Goodwin's Church-catechism, p. 16; where he expressly declares, "that the apostle makes them *distinct* officers, and that they have their several works to attend to, the pastor not being to attend to the doctrine, nor the teacher to exhortation."

gard to him who giveth, and him who sheweth mercy, it is well known that it was the opinion of Beza\* and Goodwin†, that they were either separate offices, or parts of the same office, so distinct from each other, as that many, who could discharge the last, could not perform the first. By him who giveth, they understood the deacon, and by those who shewed mercy, those pious persons whose employment it was, in the primitive times, to perform offices of mercy to Christians who were strangers, and were poor or afflicted. Of these office-bearers we have some account in 1 Tim. v. 9, 10, where, as Calvin remarks, though aged widows are particularly mentioned as intrusted with this office, the word *τις*, “any one,” is used, and which, being either masculine or feminine, shews that it might be communicated to men, perhaps advanced in age, as well as to women. Since then it appears that all the other phrases employed in this enumeration denote either *separate offices*, or *separate parts* of the same office, “he who ruleth” must signify also some office, or some part of an office, completely different from what is suggested by any of the other phrases. And since it cannot be explained as signifying him who presides over *the church-stock*, or as referring to *any* part of the deacon’s office, without making it the same with him who giveth, or him who sheweth mercy, it appears naturally to follow that the rule or presidency here mentioned, must be a rule or presidency entirely different, and a rule which is the same with that of the elder who governs, though he does not teach.

M<sup>c</sup>Knight indeed asserts, that by him who ruleth seems to be designed the person who presided in his turn in the meetings of the church, and appointed those who were to speak for their edification, who, from the extraordinary gift of discerning spirits with which he was endowed, detected and prevented heretical teachers from ministering among them, and whose province it was, along with his fellow-presidents, to decide in those cases of *civil* controversy which happened among the saints. See 1 Cor. vi. 1, 2. But there appears to be no authority from scripture for such an office; and if this were admitted, then, even according to M<sup>c</sup>Knight, as we are informed in 1 Tim. v. 17, that there

\* Consult him upon the place.

† See his Catechism, p. 27.

were some elders who presided or ruled well, and did not preach, it would elevate laymen above the pastor and teacher, and give them a power to prescribe to them in some cases their particular work. Besides, though it were granted that there was such an office, there seems to be no proper reason for limiting their power to the direction of the worship and services of the church, and the decision simply of *civil* controversies. There is a rule or presidency in the church much more important than what is mentioned by this expositor, a rule which extends to the dispensation of the privileges and the infliction of the punishments of this spiritual society. Would it not then be very extraordinary, if, in a professed enumeration of the *ordinary* offices which are instituted in it\*, and which specifies the deacon and teacher, no notice should be taken of this very interesting function, by *whomsoever* it is to be exercised? Besides, as this interpretation supposes that a few of the laymen, conjoined with the pastors, decided not only in civil controversies, but fixed the labours of the ministers of the church, and even exercised the power of denying to heretical or apostate teachers, without consulting the brethren, the liberty of speaking or preaching in their assemblies, is not this conceding that a few of the members, together with the pastors, in *many important cases*, may govern the church? And, if they may exclude *the teachers* from the rights of *teachers*, why not also exclude the members, if they shew themselves unworthy of the privileges of members; and consequently will not the same institution be authorized by this interpretation for which Presbyterians contend, when they say that a few of the members who do not teach, together with the pastors, are authorized as elders to govern the church? Or is it said, that we may reject in part the interpretation of M'Knight, and maintain that the word denotes merely presidency, without supposing that the person who presided had any other power over those among whom he presided than that of a chairman or moderator, who simply states the vote, preserves order, and determines when the number on two sides is equal? It is replied, that the term,

\* That the apostle here is speaking only of ordinary office seems evident, among other things, notwithstanding the unsubstantiated assertion of M'Knight to the contrary, from this consideration, that there is not one of them, as far as is here stated, for the discharge of which *one extraordinary* qualification was required.

when it signifies to preside, as far as we know, uniformly denotes a much higher authority—an authority which entitles him to govern and direct those over whom he is placed, and not merely to sit as a moderator while they consult and determine. It is employed, for instance, in scripture, as was before observed, 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5, 12, to denote the authority connected with a Christian's presiding over or ruling *his family*; and in Tit. iii. 8, 14, to signify the command which he should exercise *over himself*, so as to excel in good works. It is used too, as was before remarked, by Thucydides, to signify the government of a state—*προεισηκει τον δημον*, “he governed the people;” by Aristotle, in his Polit. lib. iii. cap. x, according to Constantinus in his Lexicon, in the same sense—*προεισηκισαν αυτων*, “they governed them;” by Xenophon, in his Economics, in a similar acceptation—*προεωτης σεαυτου πατριδος*, “who presidest over, or governest thy country;” by Herodotus, for the superintendent of the armory or arsenal—*της οπλοθηκης προεσηκως*, “having been set over the armory;” by the same writer, for the magistrates or governors of cities—*πρωεσωτες των πολεων*; by Plato, in his Epistles (Epist. vii), in the same sense—*μεγαλης προεσας πολεως*, “the prefect or governor of a great city;” and by Demosthenes pro Corona, in a similar acceptation—*και μεγαλων δη πραγματος προεσας*, “set even over the greatest matters, or having the supreme power.” Now, since the word, as far as we know, signifies not merely to preside over an assembly, who, as rulers, are vested with an *equality* of power with the president himself (the point of preserving order alone excepted), and can even make determinations which can authoritatively bind him no less than themselves, how can it be supposed that, in the present passage, it is to be taken in this acceptation, and that a number of men would be said to *preside as governors* over the church, agreeably to this strong expression, when all that is meant is only that they sat as chairmen in their meetings, and preserved order, while, in every other point, they were more completely subject to the power of the members than the members were to that of the presidents? But if, as we are here taught, there be a class of men who are to rule in the church, not merely as chairmen and moderators, but as governors, in whom alone, together with the pastors, the administration is vested; and if these men, as is here asserted, be distinguished from the pastor, the teacher, the deacon,



and those who, in the primitive times, shewed mercy; are we not warranted to affirm that there must be a class of elders who rule and do not teach?

The second of those passages urged by Presbyterians in support of this position, is one to which I have already solicited your attention, namely, 1 Cor. xii. 28. That the apostle, in this place, is enumerating not merely the extraordinary, as M<sup>r</sup> Knight affirms, but also the ordinary offices in the church, must be evident from the comparison instituted between the offices of the church and the offices of all the different members of the body. In speaking of the latter, the feeble as well as the strong, ver. 22, and the less honourable as well as the more honourable members are specified, ver. 21. Now, if Paul, when reprobating the Corinthian office-bearers for all aspiring at the highest functions, tells them that it was as unseemly as if all the members of the natural body should seek to be an eye, or an ear, or a sense of smelling, (ver. 17, &c.) ; and if, when speaking of the variety which, for the wisest purposes, was appointed in the body, he mentions not only the stronger and more honourable, but the *feebler* and *less honourable* members; would it not be unaccountable, if, in detailing the corresponding diversity of offices which is fitly instituted in the church of Christ, he specified those only which are *extraordinary* and *more exalted*? But if the ordinary as well as extraordinary ministers be mentioned, have we reason to believe that among the former, are included the elder who rules and does not teach?

That such was the opinion of the venerable Chrysostom, one of the most distinguished of the Christian fathers, appears to be undeniable. He understands by "the helpers," or ἀντιληψείς\*, "illi qui pauperes susciperent," i. e. "those who took care of the poor;" and by "the governments," or κυβερνήσεις, "illi qui præessent, et curam gererent, et res spirituales administrarent," i. e. "those who presided over, and managed and governed the spiritual concerns of the church." And in this opinion he is followed not only by modern Presbyterians, but by Owen, as well as many of the most respectable of the Independents. And that this interpretation is founded in truth, seems evident from an impartial review of the passage. That the apostle,

\* See his Thirty-first Homily.

in enumerating the different offices which exist in the church, specifies not merely some which are extraordinary, but others which are *ordinary*, we have already proved; and that in ascertaining which of these offices are ordinary, and which of them are extraordinary, we are to be guided by their nature, and by the common representations of them in scripture, appears to be no less evident. Judging then by these principles, it would seem that while among the extraordinary offices, are to be classed those of apostles, and prophets, and workers of miracles, among the ordinary, are to be comprehended teachers, and helps, and governments. These are not only, in their own nature, standing offices, which are continually requisite for the edification of the church, and require no miraculous gifts for their performance, but are always pointed out in scripture as ordinary offices. It has indeed been asserted by M<sup>r</sup> Knight, that by the teacher here, we are to understand an extraordinary minister, because in 1 Cor. xiv. 6, the doctrine or teaching there mentioned, means doctrine or teaching by inspiration. But though it were granted (and nothing more is there mentioned) that an *apostle*, or other extraordinary minister, *sometimes* taught by inspiration, it is certain that the term teacher, in the New Testament, commonly signifies an *ordinary* minister, who had no supernatural powers\*. It has been contended moreover, by that expositor, that by helps, or helpers, appear to be meant inspired brethren, who, speaking occasionally to the edification of the church, assisted the apostles and elders in their ministrations. But while it may justly be questioned whether any but the ministers of the church possessed these miraculous gifts for teaching, and while we never hear of such persons being helps to the apostles, we know that deacons, at the period of their institution, were expressly appointed to assist them in their work, and to free them from the labour of serving tables. It has also been maintained, that by governments are meant, persons endowed with miraculous gifts, who presided in the meetings, and directed the affairs of the primitive church. But we hear, in the New Testament, of no such inspired officers who were presidents of the church. In the account

\* It is plain, too, that as teachers are here distinguished from apostles, and prophets, and other inspired instructors, they can here denote only ordinary ministers.

which is given, (Acts xv), of the consultation at Jerusalem, upon the reference from Antioch, it was not merely the president, but the rulers at large, who spoke and advised; and, if, as is evident from the principles both of Independents and Presbyterians, any of the other members may set aside any proposal suggested by the president, and, if he is able to support it by superior reasoning, may introduce and carry any measure of his own, I cannot see how the former are entitled to the name of governments, or governors, rather than the latter. Since by governments, or governors, all who were entitled to administer the church are intended, and since, as far at least as is mentioned in the New Testament, it was not necessary for this purpose that those who were appointed to it should be furnished with any extraordinary gifts, it appears plain that the governments, who are here mentioned, were *ordinary* officers. And as they are stated as different from teachers and helps, we are warranted to infer that they are a class of elders distinct from the pastors, and teachers, and deacons, and are merely to rule in the church of Christ.

Here then is another testimony to the divine authority of the elder who rules and does not preach. Government in itself, as well as according to the uniform representation of it delivered in the New Testament, is an office for which no miraculous powers are requisite, and an office which is always necessary in the church. It is therefore an ordinary, and standing office. It is an office which is here said to be given to some only, and, therefore, in no form ought to be committed to all. It is an office which is vested neither upon the principles of Independents nor Presbyterians in the president alone, for every member of the court has as much, if not more, a voice and power than the president himself. And it is an office, moreover, completely distinct from that of the teacher, and is represented as exercised by some who are entitled to discharge no higher function. In other words, it is an office which may be discharged by elders, who do not teach.

Is it said in answer to this, that the apostle speaks here of gifts, not of offices? It is replied, that as there is an office in the natural body corresponding to the gifts bestowed by the Creator upon any of the members, so, though it were granted that the apostle speaks here only of gifts for government, it would follow from the comparison introduced in the

context, that there must be *an office* in the former for the exercise of these gifts. And, in short, as these gifts are bestowed upon many who are destitute of talents for being teachers or pastors, though admirably adapted for the office of governors, it appears no less obvious, even from this very objection, that there must be a class of elders distinct from the pastors.

Is it urged, that helps, by whom we understand deacons, are placed *before* governments, which would not be the case, if by governments were intended ruling elders, since the latter are unquestionably superior to the former? It is answered, that the sacred writers frequently pay little attention to this mode of expressing rank and dignity. Nay, this same apostle, in the 10th verse of this very chapter, though he mentions prophets, in the passage before us, as the *second* of the offices in the Christian church, places the gift of prophecy *after* the gifts of healing and other inferior gifts; and though, in this passage too, he states the gifts of miracles before gifts of healing, in the 9th verse he introduces the latter before the former. It seems obvious then, that since this very apostle, in this very chapter, mentions repeatedly offices which are inferior before offices which are confessedly greatly superior, no argument can be adduced from the position of helps, or the office of deacons, before governments or governors, against explaining the latter of ruling elders, because the former are inferior to the latter in dignity.

## LETTER XI.

SIR,

THE last, however, and most decisive argument for this order of elders is contained in 1 Tim. v. 17 ; “ a text,” according to the opinion of Dr. Owen, “ of uncontrollable evidence, if it had any thing but prejudice and interest to contend with. On the first proposal of this text,” says he, p. 246, “ that *the elders who rule well are worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine*, a rational man who is unprejudiced, who never heard of the controversy about ruling elders, can hardly avoid an apprehension that there are two sorts of elders, some that labour in the word and doctrine, and some who do not so do. The truth is, it was interest and prejudice that first caused some learned men to strain their wits to find out evasions from the evidence of this testimony : being so found, some others, of meaner abilities, have been entangled by them. For there is not one new argument advanced in this cause” (and no new arguments have been offered by Independents since his day), “ not one exception given in unto the sense of the place which we plead for, but what has long since been coined by Papists and Prelatists, and managed with better colours than some now are able to lay on them who pretend to the same judgment.”

Nor is the language of Dr. Whitaker, though a zealous Episcopalian, less strong and decided with regard to this passage. “ By these words,” says he, in his *Prælection*. apud Didioclav. p. 681, ex Sheervodio, “ the apostle evidently distinguishes between the bishops and the inspectors of the church. If all who rule well be worthy of double honour, *especially* they who labour in the word and doctrine, it is plain that there were some who did not so labour : for if all had been of this description, the meaning would have been absurd ; but the word *especially* points out a difference. If I should say that all they who study well at the university are worthy of double honour, *especially they who labour in the study of theology*, I must either mean that *all* do not apply themselves to the study of theology, or I should speak nonsense. Wherefore I confess that to be the most genuine sense by which



“pastors and teachers are distinguished from those who  
 “only governed, Rom. xii. 8; of whom we read in Am-  
 “brose upon 1 Tim. v. 17.” Illis verbis diserte distinguit  
 apostolus inter episcopos et inspectores ecclesiæ. Si omnes  
 duplici honore sint digni qui bene præsumt, maxime ii qui  
 laborant in sermone et doctrina, perspicuum est fuisse ali-  
 quos qui non laborarunt. Nam si omnes fuissent tales,  
 sensus fuisset absurdus, sed *μαλιστα* ponit discrimen. Si  
 dicerem omnes academici qui bene student, sunt duplici  
 honore digni, maxime ii qui laborant in studio theologiæ, vel  
 innuo non omnes incumbere studio theologiæ, vel insulse lo-  
 quor. Quamobrem fateor illum esse sensum maxime genui-  
 num quo pastores et doctores discernuntur ab aliis qui solum  
 gubernabant, Rom. xii. 8, de quibus in Ambrosio legimus,  
 1 Tim. v. 17. And says Dr. Whitby on this passage,  
 though no less rigid an Episcopalian, “The elders of the  
 “Jews were of *two* sorts: 1st, Such as *governed* in the  
 “synagogue: and 2dly, Such as ministered in *reading* and  
 “*expounding* their scriptures, &c. And these the apostle  
 “here declares to be the most honourable, and worthy of  
 “the chiefest reward. Accordingly the apostle, reckoning  
 “up the offices God had appointed in the church, places  
 “teachers before governments: 1 Cor. xii.”

Here, then, even according to the concessions of some of  
 the enemies of Presbytery, *two* classes of elders are mention-  
 ed, one who rule well, and, on account of it, are worthy of  
 double honour, and one who not only rule, but labour also  
 in the word and doctrine, and are more especially worthy of  
 double honour.

To this interpretation, however, a number of objections  
 have been urged by Episcopalians, and repeated by Inde-  
 pendents, but all of them intended to support explications  
 too forced and abstruse to present themselves readily to a  
 candid reader. Some, for instance, with the famous Joseph  
 Mede, have contended that by those who rule well, are in-  
 tended subordinate civil magistrates. But we know that  
 there was not one Christian magistrate at that period in the  
 church, nor for some hundred years after this Epistle was  
 written; and were Christian magistrates the rulers here re-  
 ferred to, it would be a necessary consequence, that as those  
 who labour in the word and doctrine are represented in this  
 verse as more worthy than the first of double maintenance  
 or honour, they ought to have a more liberal appointment

than the civil magistrates. Others have maintained, that by those who ruled well, were to be understood superannuated bishops, who, though they might assist in government, could not teach; and that by those who laboured in the word and doctrine, are meant the younger ministers, who were fit for the vigorous discharge of this office\*. But how could these elders rule well, who were so superannuated that they could not preach? And if the *younger* ministers received greater honour and maintenance than those who had become old in the cause of Christ, and had spent their strength and years in his service, would not this indeed be a most unsuitable return for their zeal and labours? How then, according to the observation of Solomon, could their gray hairs be to them a crown of glory, though found in the ways of righteousness?

Others have alledged†, that by the elders who rule well, are signified the *stated* pastors of the church, and by those who *laboured* in the word and doctrine, evangelists who itinerated for the diffusion of the gospel. But it is a fact which is incontestable, that in 1 Thess. v. 12. *τοὺς κοπιῶντας*, “those who *laboured* in that church, and were *over them* “in the Lord,” was the name given to their stated pastors; and consequently that interpretation which would represent those who *laboured* in the word and doctrine as evangelists, and those who ruled well as *stated pastors*, must be totally groundless.

Some, in short, with Sutcliffe de Presbyterio, p. 75, affirm, that the word here rendered “especially” (*μαλιστα*), should be translated “much;” and that the apostle, instead of naming *two* classes of elders, only assigns the reason why those whom he had mentioned as ruling well should receive double honour: “Let the elders who rule well,” say they, his words should be rendered, “be counted worthy of “double honour, they labouring,” *i. e.* because they labour “*much* in the word and doctrine.” But upon this it is observed, that it would be for *preaching alone* and not for ruling, according to this interpretation, that the honour would be claimed; and can we suppose for a moment, that no honour is to be the reward of ruling aright? Besides, as the learned Calderwood, in his *Altare Damascenum*,

\* See Bishop King's Sermon on Canticles viii.

† See Bilson on Church-government, p. 135.

p. 919, has remarked, had this been the meaning of the apostle, he would not have said *μαλιστα οἱ κοπιῶντες*, but *οἱ μαλιστα κοπιῶντες*, or *μαλιστα κοπιῶντες*; i. e. "Let the elders be counted worthy of double honour who rule well, labouring greatly, or they labouring greatly in the word and doctrine," and not as the present arrangement of the Greek words suggests, "Let the elders be counted worthy of double honour who rule well, *especially* they who labour in word and doctrine." Besides, in every other similar passage where the word (here translated *especially*) occurs, it uniformly means a distinction of *two persons or things*. Thus, in this very chapter, ver. 8, "If any man provide not for his own, and *especially* for those of his own house, &c." where, though the neglect of one's own is condemned, the neglect of one's nearest relatives is evidently held out as *much more* reprehensible. Thus too, chap. iv. ver. 10, "Who is the Saviour," or, as the word should here be rendered, "the Preserver of all men, *especially* of them who believe," where two classes of persons are obviously distinguished. Thus likewise, 2 Tim. iv. 13, "Bring the Books, *especially* the parchments;" and Gal. iv. 10, "Let us do good to all men, but *especially* unto the household of faith." See also Philip iv. 22. Titus i. 10. 2 Pet. ii. 9, 10, and Acts xx. 39, which are all the parallel instances, as far as I have discovered, where it occurs in the New Testament, and in all of which it marks a distinction between two classes of persons or things. Now, when we see the apostle, in the passages before us, after speaking of elders who rule well, insert this very word between these and elders who are engaged in preaching, is it not plain that he intended to suggest by it here, as in all these other instances, *two* classes of persons, some who ruled well and did not teach, and others who taught as well as ruled?

In answer to this, let it not be objected that the particle *δε*, "but," is not in this passage subjoined to *μαλιστα*, "*especially*," as it ought to have been, had the latter word, as we contend, signified *especially*. It is not to be found in a number of the passages quoted above, where, however, the word here translated "*especially*," can admit only of that meaning. Thus, in 1 Tim. iv. 10, "Who is the Preserver of all men, *especially* of them who believe"—not "*but especially*," *μαλιστα πιστων*, not *μαλιστα δε πιστων*. And

thus too, in Titus i. 10, “ For there are many unruly and  
 “ vain talkers and deceivers, *especially* they of the circum-  
 “ cision”—not “ *but especially*,” *μαλιστα* οἱ, not *μαλιστα* δε  
 οἱ *ἐκ περιτομῆς*. Accordingly the old Hebrew translators  
 have rendered *μαλιστα*, in 1 Tim. v. 17, which, in our ver-  
 sion, is translated “ *especially*,” by a word which signifies,  
 in connection with *κοπιῶντες* “ *eminently* they who labour in  
 “ word and doctrine ;” the Syriac version by another, which  
 signifies “ *chiefly or principally* they” who do so ; and the  
 Old Latin Version or Vulgate, by *maxime*, a term of the  
 same import. Hence it would seem that the apostle, in the  
 latter clause, is not pointing out merely a reason why the  
 elders who ruled well should receive double honour, but  
 clearly distinguishing, by the term *μαλιστα*, “ *especially*,”  
 two classes of elders, one who ruled and did not teach, and  
 one who taught as well as ruled.

Others, with Bilson, in his Treatise on Church-govern-  
 ment, p. 113, and Tilenus, in his Parænes. cap. xi, admit  
 that a *distinction* is here stated, but contend that it is not  
 between elders in *different offices*, but between *different* elders  
 in the *same* office. All elders, they tell us, teach and rule,  
 but there are some who are distinguished for their *extraor-  
 dinary labours* in the cause of Christ, and it is to them they  
 apprehend that the apostle refers, when he speaks of those  
 who “ labour” (*κοπιῶντες*) in word and doctrine. The  
 meaning of Paul therefore, according to them, is, “ Let the  
 “ elders who rule well, and who teach, be counted worthy  
 “ of double honour, especially they who are noted for their  
 “ extraordinary exertions in the word and doctrine.” This  
 interpretation, too, has been generally adopted by the Inde-  
 pendents, as it is by your brother Mr. Ballentine, in his late  
 publication, p. 88. It is probable, however, that had this  
 been the meaning of the apostle, he would have said, “ Let  
 “ the elders who rule and *preach well* be counted worthy of  
 “ double honour, especially they who labour in the word  
 “ and doctrine.” But instead of this, we see that he has  
 simply said, “ Let the elders who *rule well* be counted  
 “ worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in  
 “ the word and doctrine.” Besides, though the word  
*κοπιῶ* denotes greater labour than *ποιῶ* and labour which,  
 in one view, may be called *extraordin-  
 ary*, this is nothing  
 more than what is represented in scripture as the duty of  
*every one* who is a teaching elder. It is employed by Paul,

1 Cor. iii. 8, to signify the *common* duty of every teaching elder: "Now he that planteth," says he, "and he that watereth, are both one; and *every man* shall receive his *own* reward, according to his labour, κοπον.." And, says he, 1 Thess. v. 12, 13, "Know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord," where it is represented as the *common* duty and work of all the teachers. Thus, too, it is expressive of the *common* duty and work of all the Old Testament teachers. John iv. 38, "I sent you to reap that whereon you bestowed no labour: others have laboured, and ye have entered into their labours"—where the verb and noun which are used by Paul occur no less than thrice. And, in short, we know that when the apostle intends to express *unusual* exertion, he employs another word besides κοπιω. Thus, when he speaks of the *extraordinary* exertions of Mary and Persis to promote the gospel in their private stations, he expresses it not merely by κοπιω, but by πολλὰ ἐκοπιασαν, "they laboured much." Rom. xvi. 6, 13. And when he mentions his own *extraordinary* exertions, 1 Cor. xv. 10, he says, that "he laboured (περισσότερον) *more abundantly*." And especially when he designs to convey this idea in the most forcible manner, he couples this term with a word which signifies not merely, like κοπος, labour connected with care and anxiety, but agreeably to the observation of the very able Zanchius on 1 Thess. ii. 9\*, which combines besides this, the idea of *completely fatiguing* and *overpowering* the person. Thus, in 2 Cor. xi. 27, in enumerating his hardships, he speaks of himself as having been "in weariness and painfulness," or, as it should more literally be rendered, "in labour and wearisomeness," κοπον και μοχθον. So also, in 1 Thess. ii. 9, he says, "For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travel," or, as it more properly means, "our labour and wearisomeness," κοπον και μοχθον. Since κοπιω then, as we have seen, which is translated, in 1 Tim. v. 17, "to labour," properly signifies the *common* duty and work of every teacher, and since the apostle, when he intends to denote an *extraordinary* exertion, couples it

\* Κοπος non est simplex labor, sed labor cum summa cura et sollicitudine conjunctus; μοχθος amplius addit: est enim labor, non solum sollicitudinem, sed etiam defatigationem conjunctam habens. Cum enim quis diu multumque operatus est, solet, laboris mole pressus, defatigari.



with such words as “much” (πολλα), or “more abundantly” (περισσοτερον), it seems plain that, in this passage, the elders who are said to labour in word and doctrine, are not persons who make extraordinary exertions in preaching, but simply such as perform the *common* duties of teaching elders. But if *two* kinds of elders be mentioned in that passage, and if those who labour in the word and doctrine be such as are engaged only in the *common* duties of teaching elders, does it not follow, agreeably to the introductory clause of the verse, that there are to be elders in the church *distinct* from the former, and who, when they *merely rule well*, though they do not teach, are entitled, on account of it, to double honour?

Others, in fine, have asserted with Downham, and Sutcliffe, and other ancient Episcopalians, that the word *τιμη*, here translated *honour*, denotes not merely honour, but, as appears from a Homily of Chrysostom on the passage, and the Expositions of Calvin, and Beza, and Bullinger, as well as the following verse, maintenance also. But if it mean maintenance, and if two kinds of elders be mentioned, each of them must be entitled to double or proper maintenance, a circumstance which, in their view, would be extremely inconsistent. On this objection also Mr. Ballentine lays considerable stress, and urges it against Presbyterians with abundance of confidence. But I do not see on what principle it is inconsistent with the tenets of Presbyterians to grant even to lay-elders proper maintenance, if their circumstances require it, or if at any time they are called from their employments to the business of the church longer than their secular interests permit. Besides, it is evident from the distinction which is here stated between elders who only rule, and elders who teach and give themselves wholly to their sacred vocation, that attention is, in the first place, to be paid to the maintenance of the latter. The former, if they need it, are to receive maintenance; but it is *especially* to be given to such as preach, and have no other means of procuring subsistence. If, after they are provided for, the church is able to compensate the lay-elders for that time which they devote to her particular business, she is bound to do it. Is it objected to this reasoning, as has often been done by Independents\*, that the terms elder and bishop are

\* See Sandeman's Letter to Mr. Wilson.

applied in scripture to the same individuals, and as every bishop is required by Paul, (1 Tim. iii. 2), to be "apt to teach," none should be elders who are not public teachers? It is replied, that such an inference is not deducible from the passage. All that is asserted in it appears simply to be this, that an elder, or bishop, should be fitted to teach, according to the station which he holds in the church. The preaching elder should be qualified to teach publicly, according to the nature of his particular function; and the ruling elder should be qualified to teach, and admonish, and counsel privately, according to the particular nature of his office. But because an elder, or bishop, should be apt to teach, *according to the particular nature of his office*, can it fairly be inferred that none are to be elders but those who are qualified to be preachers of the gospel?

If it is still contended, that as *all* the elders of the church of Ephesus are commanded by Paul, (Acts xx. 28), to feed that church, they must all have been ministers of the word, because it is the province of the minister, and not of the ruling elder, to feed the church? It is answered, that though lay-elders cannot feed the church by public instructions like the teaching elder, they may undoubtedly do so in their private capacity, by that information, and counsel, and comfort, which they may communicate to the members. Besides, the word here translated "feed," frequently means to rule, as a shepherd does his flock, as was before observed\*, which is done by them no less than by the former. If the word then be translated *to feed*, it is obvious that the lay-elders might be enjoined by the apostle to perform this duty as well as the ministers, because they were no less bound to feed the church by their private instructions, than the former were bound to do so by their public discourses; and if it be rendered *to rule*, it is evident that they were no less admitted to discharge this office than the teachers themselves. It cannot, therefore, be evinced from the present passage, that there ought not to be an order of elders in the church, who barely rule, distinct from the elders who rule and teach.

In short, even conceding that, in both of these instances, the terms refer to *public* teaching only, it cannot be inferred that because *elders in general* are called thus to teach and

\* See Note, p. 56.

feed, there are not other elders, who, though they govern the church, cannot perform these duties. General declarations, of whatever kind, very frequently admit of particular exceptions. It is said, for example, respecting *the whole of the tribe of Levi* in general, (Deut. xxxiii. 8, 10), that “they should teach Jacob God’s judgments, and Israel his law: that they should *put incense* before him, and whole burnt sacrifice upon his altar.” And, agreeably to this, we are told that Jehoshaphat, when he had convened them upon a particular occasion, (2 Chron. xxix. 5), thus addressed *all* of them, (ver. 11), “My sons, be not now negligent, for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that you should minister unto him, and *burn incense.*” Though *all* of them, however, are said, in the one passage, to have been originally appointed to burn incense before God, and though *all* of them are commanded to do so in the other, yet we know, from other passages, that there were *many* of the Levites who, though employed in the service of the ancient sanctuary, were not authorized to perform this part of the sacerdotal function. Allowing then that it could even be proved that *elders in general* are required by Paul to be apt to preach, and that *the whole* of the elders in the church of Ephesus are apparently enjoined to perform this function (and this cannot be demonstrated), if it can be evinced, from *other passages*, that there should be a class of elders who are merely to rule and not to preach, it will no more follow, from these general injunctions, that these should not exist in every church, than it will follow, from the passages before produced, that none were connected with the tribe of Levi, or admitted to minister in the ancient sanctuary, but such as burned incense.

On the whole, as this separate order of elders seems clearly to be authorized by the sacred oracles, so it appears from the writings of the primitive fathers, that even from the earliest ages it existed in the church. In the year 103, we meet with these words in the very same sentence of the *Gesta Purgationis Cæciliani et Felicis*: “Presbyteri, diacones, et seniores, *i. e.* The presbyters or pastors, the deacons and elders;” and a little after that, “Adhibete conclericos et seniores plebis, ecclesiasticos viros, et inquirant diligenter quæ sint istæ dissensiones, *i. e.* Add the fellow-clergymen and *elders* of the people, ecclesiastical men, and let them inquire diligently what are these

“dissensions.” In that assembly likewise, different letters were produced and read: one addressed, “Clero et senioribus, *i. e.* To the clergymen and the elders;” and another, “Clericis et senioribus, *i. e.* To the clergymen and the elders.” Origen too, who flourished only a little more than 200 years after Christ, has these expressions in the third book of his Treatise against Celsus: “There are some rulers appointed who may inquire concerning the conversation and manners of those that are admitted, that they may debar from the congregation such as commit filthiness.” But does not this contain a most accurate description of one important part of the office of the elder who is barely to rule? Cyprian moreover, bishop of Carthage, who lived about 240 years after Christ, in his Thirty-ninth Epistle, book iv, (according to the edition of Goulart), writing to his presbyters, and elders, and people, respecting one Numidicus, enjoins that he should be reckoned with the presbyters of that church, and should sit with *the clergy*, to make up their Presbytery. And yet it would seem that it was only as a ruling, and not a teaching presbyter, that he was to be received by them: for he adds, “Et promovetur quidem, cum Deus permiserit, ad *ampliores locum* religionis suæ, quando in præsentiam protegente Domino venerimus; *i. e.* And indeed, if it be the will of God, he shall be promoted to a *more distinguished* place of his religion, or religious function, when, through the Lord’s protection, we shall arrive.” But what more honourable place could he attain, if he was already a teaching elder, and consequently, at that period, next to the bishop? In the passage before quoted, from the Commentaries of Ambrose, upon 1 Tim. v. 1, the testimony which is given to the existence, in the church, of an order of elders who merely ruled, and were distinct from those who also preached, is strong and pointed. He shews, that by the elders or seniores, of whom he speaks, he does not mean only a few of the more aged and experienced of the members, for he compares them to the elders in *the Jewish synagogue*, and attributes to them an equality of power, and we know that the latter were not merely private members of the synagogue, venerable for their wisdom as well as age, but *elders by office*. He discovers also no less clearly, that he does not intend simply, by the elders to whom he refers, persons whose opinion was *occasionally* consulted in difficult matters,

for he says expressly, that “without their counsel *nothing* “ was done in the church : Unde et synagoga et postea ecclesia seniores habuit, *quorum sine consilio nihil agebatur in ecclesia.*” And that these elders likewise were admitted not only to state their opinion and deliver their advice, but to rule with an authority not inferior to that of the clergy, he no less plainly declares ; for he ascribes to the pride and ambition of the teachers, the discontinuance of this order in a number of places, which, while it remained amongst them, curbed the former, and set bounds to the latter. But how could these elders have restrained their ambition, and prevented their undue assumptions of power, if they were permitted in the ancient church, to deliver an advice only, which might be adopted or rejected by the clergy at pleasure ? Indeed so incontrovertible did this testimony for the existence of this order of office-bearers, in the ancient church, appear to many who were opponents of Presbytery, that it was not only admitted, as we have already seen, by some of the more candid of the ancient Episcopalians, but by some of the most respectable even of the Independents themselves. Among these is included, Mr. Cotton of America, already mentioned, who, in his *Way of the Churches in New England*, cap. ii. sect. ii. p. 30, acknowledges it to be a clear and irresistible proof of the existence of this order in the ancient church, and vindicates the argument which he adduces from this passage, for the necessity of this order even in *Independent churches*, from the exceptions and cavils of some of his brethren and others. And, in fine, Augustine, bishop of Hippo, who lived about the year 420, often refers to these elders in his writings. Thus, in his *Treatise against Cresconius*, lib. iii. cap. lvi, “ Peregrinus presbyter et seniores Musticanæ regionis, *i. e.* “ Peregrine the presbyter, and *the elders* of the Mustican “ district,” where he obviously distinguishes between the pastor or presbyter who taught, and separate elders or seniors. Thus, also, he addresses one of his letters to his church at Hippo, (Epist. cxxxix), “ Dilectissimis fratribus, “ clero, senioribus, et universæ plebi ecclesiæ Hipponensis, “ *i. e.* To the beloved brethren, the clergy, or clergyman, “ the elders, and all the people of the church at Hippo,” where he makes an obvious discrimination between the clergy, or clergyman, the elders, and the people. And were it thought requisite, it would be easy to bring forward



other testimonies from Eusebius, and Isidore, and Jerome, and others, no less clearly demonstrative of the existence of this order in the primitive church. What has already been stated however, appears sufficiently to establish the fact; and consequently we seem equally authorized by these documents to affirm that this order obtained in the ages which succeeded the apostles, as we seem to be authorized by reason to affirm that it is necessary, and by scripture to maintain that it is divinely appointed.

To contend then with some Independents, that every congregation should not be governed by what has been denominated by Presbyterians a Session, because the term does not occur in the sacred volume, though the doctrine seems to be undeniable, must be foolish and contradictory. Upon the same principle it would follow, according to the reasonings of Socinians and Arminians, that because the terms Trinity, satisfaction, original sin, efficacious grace, particular redemption, are not to be found in the sacred oracles, these doctrines are merely inventions of men. If Independents however, as well as others, admit these doctrines, because they are revealed in scripture, though these particular terms are not there employed to denote them, on the same principle is it not plain that if it be taught in scripture that only *some*, and not *all the members indiscriminately*, are authorized to govern a particular congregation, and that among these are included elders who do not teach, but simply rule, as well as elders who not only rule but teach, the doctrine of Sessions is clearly established, though *that particular word* is not to be met with in the sacred volume?

## LETTER XII.

SIR,

THE last point of government in which you differ from Presbyterians, is their courts of *review*; or the subordination of a particular congregation, with its elders, to the authoritative inspection and controul of a Presbytery, and of a Presbytery to that of a Synod and Assembly. It is proposed accordingly, agreeably to our method, to conclude these inquiries upon this point of the subject, with the consideration of this distinguishing principle of Presbytery, with the different objections which you have advanced against it.

With regard to the propriety of ecclesiastical courts superior to the rulers of a particular congregation, much diversity of sentiment has obtained even among Independents. Some, in the greatness of their zeal against Presbytery, have maintained that it is unlawful for an Independent congregation, even in a difficult case, to convene the pastors of any other churches merely to ask their advice. Such a measure, in their opinion\*, would be prejudicial to the improvement of the members in knowledge, for if they were assured that in every case of difficulty and importance they might have recourse to this superior assembly, though merely for *counsel*, it would make them less eager to advance in an acquaintance with the truths and laws of Christ. Every separate church therefore, according to them, must be completely independent even of *the assistance* of others, and must not solicit, in *any* instance, the advice of their office-bearers met in a collective or associated capacity. It seems obvious, however, that before this reasoning can be considered as valid, it must be proved that *infallibility* has been the attainment of every Independent congregation; or why should it refuse to apply for assistance, in any arduous or interesting case, to an assembly of the office-bearers of other churches? Or, if infallibility be disclaimed by them, it should be demonstrated that though they *may* err, it is better for them to do so, since they have the satisfaction of being regarded as the unassisted arbiters in all their affairs, than to be prevented from this evil, by being aided by the opinion and counsel of others. And, in short, upon the same prin-

\* See Missionary Magazine for October 1804, p. 443.

ciple that it is affirmed that the members of a particular congregation ought not to apply to others for advice, because it may abate their zeal to improve in knowledge so as to be enabled to decide in every cause, it may be proved that the offence mentioned by our Saviour in Matth. xviii, should be finally determined by the *two or three* brethren before whom it is enjoined to be first told, and ought not to be announced to the church at all. If announced to the church for their examination and judgment, may it not, if the preceding argument were just, diminish the motives which are presented to each of *the members individually* to endeavour to improve, so as to be himself qualified, with the assistance of a single brother, finally to decide a cause? And, upon the same ground also, is it not manifest that there should be no subordination in *civil* courts, because, if this principle be admitted, it would make the members of the lowest of such associations less eager to improve in juridical knowledge, than if they knew that, in every instance, they were to depend solely on their own judgment and sagacity, and were not to solicit the assistance of others?

While such, however, are the sentiments of others, you profess to hold a very opposite opinion, and admit at once the lawfulness and the utility of the associations of the pastors of a number of churches to deliberate in points of intricacy and magnitude. The power, however, which you grant to these associations is purely consultative, and differs not only from that degree of authority which is allowed by Presbyterians to a Presbytery, over the governors of a particular congregation, and to a Synod, over the members of a particular Presbytery, but even from what was vested by the respectable ancient Independents, already quoted, in their occasional Synods. Not only does Mr. Hooker acknowledge in his Survey, p. 4. cap. i. ii, that the association of the pastors of different congregations, in one court or Presbytery, is lawful and beneficial, and not only does he grant that they may be of “*different sorts and degrees, some lesser, some greater, Classes, Synods, and these Provincial, National, Ecumenical or Universal:*” but his brother Mr. Cotton, in his book entitled the Keys of the Kingdom, uses very remarkable expressions, (chap. vi), respecting the power of such courts. “They have power,” says he, “not only to give *light* and *counsell* in matter of truth and practice, but also to *command* and *enjoine* the things to

“ be believed and done. The expresse words of the synodical letter, Acts xv. 27, imply no lesse. It is an act of the power of the keyes to binde burdens; and this binding power ariseth not only materially from *the weight* of the matters imposed, but also formally from *the authority* of the Synod, which being an ordinance of Christ, bindeth the more for the Synod’s sake.” The Westminster Independents also, in their debate with the Assembly, not only expressly allow, p. 115, 137, 138, that “ Synods are an *holy ordinance of God*, and of *great use* for the finding out and declaring of truth in difficult cases, and for healing offences,” but likewise declare, “ that *all the churches in a province*, being offended at a particular congregation, may call that single congregation to account; yea, *all the churches in a nation*, may call one or more congregations to an account—that they may examine and admonish, and, in case of obstinacy, declare them to be subverters of the faith—that they are of use to give advice to the *magistrate* in matters of religion,” p. 115,—“ that they have authority to *determine concerning controversies of faith*—that their determinations are to be received with great honour and conscientious respect and obligation, as from Christ—that if an offending congregation refuse to submit to their determinations, they may withdraw from them, and deny church-communion and fellowship with them—and that this sentence of non-communion may be ratified and backed with the authority of the civil magistrate, to the end it may be the more effectual,” p. 138\*. Mr. Thomas Goodwin, moreover, in his *Treatise on the Government of the Church of Christ*, p. 202, very pointedly asserts, “ that as we acknowledge elective occasional Synods of the elders of many churches, as the churches have need to refer cases of difference to

\* Since it is evident from this and other passages in the papers of these forerunners of our present Independents, that they no less certainly believed in the propriety of a connection between the church and state than our *Presbyterian Establishment* does, nay, as their ideas on this subject were greatly higher than what is professed by it since the act of toleration; if the latter be viewed by them, on account of this connection, as worthy of being distinguished by the name of Babylon, upon the same principle must it not be extended to their ancient predecessors, and must not modern Independents be considered at least as the children of those who were members and supporters of spiritual Babylon.

“ them : so in case of mal-administration, or an unjust pro-  
 “ ceeding, in the sentence of excommunication, and the like,  
 “ we acknowledge *appeals* or *complaints* may be made to  
 “ other churches ; and the elders of those churches met in a  
 “ Synod, who, being offended, may, as *an ordinance* of  
 “ Christ, *judge* and *declare* that sentence to be null, void,  
 “ and unjust : and that not simply, as *any company of men*  
 “ may so judge, giving their judgments of a fact done ;  
 “ but as an ordinance of Christ in such cases, and for that  
 “ end, *sanctified by him* to *judge* and *declare* in matters of  
 “ difference.” And, again, he adds, “ In case this church  
 “ will not own this person thus wrongfully ejected ; these  
 “ churches, or any of them, upon this determination of their  
 “ elders (the churches at their return approving the sen-  
 “ tence), may both receive the party in among themselves,  
 “ and so relieve the man ; and further also profess to hold  
 “ no communion with that church, if they perceive that  
 “ church doth continue obstinate, having either for the  
 “ manner proceeded therein, against the common principles  
 “ of equity and right, or against, and beside the principles  
 “ whereby churches are to proceed which that church itself  
 “ hath, and doth hold forth and profess.” But does not  
 this, whatever was intended by the author, plainly sanction  
*an authoritative court of review* ? Is it not here declared,  
 that when an improper decision is passed by the rulers of  
 any particular congregation, the persons who are aggrieved  
 may *appeal* and *complain* to a meeting of the elders of a  
 number of *distinct* and nominally independent congregations  
 —That these ministers, met in this court, may, as *an ordi-*  
*nance of Christ*, *declare* that sentence to be *null and void*,  
 and enjoin that church to review their deed ; and—that if  
 the church which has erred persists in its error, these minis-  
 ters of *separate* and *distinct* congregations may pass a deci-  
 sion, declaring that they shall henceforth be cut off from  
 their communion, which decision, if ratified by the consent  
 of their churches, shall be considered as binding ? Does  
 this declaration however of what the needs of the church at  
 present demand (and the author cannot be supposed to have  
 been partial to Presbytery), correspond with what *you* tell  
 us should be the situation of *every congregation*, and what  
 you glory in as the boast of every *Independent* society ?  
 Was it the opinion of this man, even though an Independent,  
 that “ every particular congregation,” as you allege,



“ should have the *sole* government of its own affairs, and be  
 “ amenable to no society of men under heaven ; and that  
 “ while, in reference to its own members, its decision was  
 “ final, it should pretend to *interfere with none else ?*” Or  
 whatever might be the *independency* which he might ascribe  
 to them *in profession*, does he not subject them as really to  
 the *authoritative controul* of this assembly of the pastors of  
*other* congregations, if supported by their *churches*, as any  
*Presbyterian* congregation is to that of a Presbytery, or a  
 Presbytery is to that of a Synod or Assembly\*? The same  
 remark which is here offered upon Goodwin, may be also ap-  
 plied to the extract which was made from the papers of the  
 rest of the Westminster Independents.

That similar sentiments were professed by the great Dr.  
 Owen is evident from his book on the Nature and Govern-  
 ment of the Gospel-church. “ No church therefore,” says  
 he, (p. 413), “ is *so independent*, as that it can always,  
 “ and in all cases, observe the duties it owes unto the Lord  
 “ Christ and the church catholic, by all those powers which  
 “ it is able to act *in itself distinctly, without conjunction*  
 “ *with others*. And the church that confines its duty

\* Is it objected, that the case must undoubtedly be different,  
 because the congregation which has erred may either obey or re-  
 ject the decision of these pastors, even though supported by their  
 churches? It is replied, that if they do so, according to Goodwin,  
 even though an Independent, they must be cut off from their com-  
 munion; and in what respect does this differ from the authority  
 which is claimed by a Presbytery, or Synod, as a court of review?  
 This convention of the pastors of Independent churches, though  
 they profess *merely* to deliver an *advice* to the congregation which  
 has erred, and require them simply to review their sentence, tell  
 them at the same time, that if they do not pronounce it “ null and  
 “ void,” and adopt the decision which they point out, no fellow-  
 ship can henceforth be granted to them with their churches. And  
 to say that the congregations to which these pastors belong, must  
 ratify this determination before it can be valid, does not alter the  
 matter, but only demonstrates that this power of controul, and  
 authoritative review, over a particular congregation, which Pres-  
 byterians affirm ought to be lodged in a Presbytery, or Synod, or  
 Assembly, should be vested also in the members of these different  
 churches as well as their pastors. The necessity of the subordina-  
 tion of this church to the review of these others is still admitted;  
 and this subordination, in opposition to you and the rest of your  
 brethren, one of the wisest and best of the ancient Independents  
 affirms to be indispensable for promoting the interests of the church  
 of God.

“ unto the acts of its own assemblies, *cuts itself off from the*  
 “ *external communion of the church catholic ; nor will it be*  
 “ *safe for any man to commit the conduct of his soul to*  
 “ *such a church. Wherefore,*” he adds, “ this acting in  
 “ Synods is an *institution of Jesus Christ ; not in an ex-*  
 “ *press command, but in the nature of the thing itself,*  
 “ *fortified with apostolical example.* For having erected  
 “ such a church-state, and disposed all his churches into  
 “ that order and mutual relation unto one another, as that  
 “ *none of them can be complete,* or discharge their whole  
 “ duty without mutual advice and counsel ; he hath thereby  
 “ ordained this way of their communion in Synods, *no other*  
 “ *being possible unto that end.* And hereby such conven-  
 “ tions are interested in the promise of his presence, namely,  
 “ that, where two or three are gathered together in his  
 “ name, there he will be in the midst of them. For these  
 “ assemblies being the necessary effect of his own constitu-  
 “ tion in the nature and use of his churches, are, or may be,  
 “ in his name, and so enjoy his presence,”

Besides, he observes, (p. 414), that “ the end of all par-  
 “ ticular churches is the edification of the church catholic  
 “ unto the glory of God in Christ. And it is evident,  
 “ that in many instances this cannot be attained, yea, that  
 “ *it must be sinfully neglected,* unless this way for the pre-  
 “ servation and carrying of it on be attended unto. Truth,  
 “ peace, and love, may be lost among churches, and so the  
 “ union of the catholic church in them be dissolved, unless  
 “ this means for their preservation and reparation be made  
 “ use of. And that particular church which extends not  
 “ its duty *beyond its own assemblies and members, is fallen*  
 “ *off from the principal end of its institution.* And every  
 “ principle, opinion, or persuasion, that inclines any church  
 “ to confine its care and duty unto its own edification only,  
 “ yea, or of those only which agree with it in some peculiar  
 “ practice, making it neglective of all due means of the  
 “ edification of the church catholic, is *schismatical.*

“ There is direction hereunto included in the order and  
 “ method of church-proceedings in case of offence, prescrib-  
 “ ed unto it by Christ himself. The beginning and rise of  
 “ it is between two individual persons ; thence it is carried  
 “ unto the cognizance and judgment of two or three others  
 “ before unconcerned ; from them it is to be brought unto  
 “ the church ; and there is no doubt but the church hath

“ power to determine concerning it, as unto its own communion, to continue the offender in it, or reject him from it. - This must abide, as unto outward order and the preservation of peace. But no church is infallible in their judgment absolutely in any case; and in many, their determinations may be so doubtful as not to affect the conscience of him who is censured. But such a person is not only a member of that particular church, but by virtue thereof, of the catholic church also. It is necessary therefore that he should *be heard and judged* as unto his interest therein, if he do desire it. And this can *no way be done*, but *by such Synods* as we shall immediately describe.

“ Synods” (p. 416), “ are consecrated unto the use of the church *in all ages*, by the example of the apostles, in their guidance of the first churches of Jews and Gentiles; which hath the force of a *divine institution*, as being given by them under the infallible conduct of the Holy Ghost, Acts xv. which we shall speak farther unto immediately.

“ Upon the whole,” he remarks, p. 419, “ if it be reported or known by credible testimony, that any church hath admitted into the exercise of divine worship any thing superstitious or vain, or if the members of it walk like those described by the apostle, Philip. iii. 18, 19, unto the dishonour of the gospel, and of the ways of Christ, the church itself not endeavouring its own reformation and repentance; other churches, walking in communion therewith, by virtue of their common interest in the glory of Christ, and honour of the gospel, after more private ways for its reduction, as opportunity and duty may suggest unto their elders, ought to assemble in a Synod for advice, either as to the use of farther means for the recovery of such a church, or to *withhold communion* from it in case of obstinacy in its evil ways. The want of a due attendance unto this part of the communion of churches, with respect unto gospel-worship in its purity, and gospel-obedience in its power, was a great means of the decay and apostasy of them all. By reason of this negligence, instead of being helpful one to another, for their mutual recovery, and the revival *of the things that were ready to die*, they gradually infected one another, according as they fell into their decays, and countenanced

“one another by their examples unto a continuance in such disorders.” And with respect to the extent of these Synods, in p. 426, he says, “Yet this I shall say, that whereas it is eminently useful unto the church catholic, that all the churches professing the same doctrine of faith, within the limits of *the same supreme civil government*, should hold constant actual communion among themselves unto the ends of it before mentioned, I see not how it can be *any abridgment of the liberty of particular churches*, or interfere with any of their rights which they hold by divine institution, if through more constant *lesser* Synods for advice, there be a communication of their mutual concerns to those that are *greater*, until, if occasion require, and if it be expedient *there be a General Assembly* of them all, to advise about any thing wherein they are all concerned.

Thus while many of the most zealous modern Independents reprobate the idea of convening the pastors of other congregations in a Presbytery, or Synod, or General Assembly, to review, in any case of error or injustice, a decision which has been passed in a particular congregation, the opinion which was held by this most distinguished ancient advocate for Independency, was directly opposite. Every church which is not connected with such courts of superintendence (and this is the case certainly with the Tabernacle churches), “is cut off,” at least in his view, “from the external communion of the church catholic in a most important relation; nor will it be safe,” he even affirms, “for any man,” however it may be admired and applauded by many, “to commit his soul to such a church.” Nay, however such courts may be decried by his modern, but perhaps not more enlightened followers, “no church,” according to him, “can be complete without them; and the church which wants them, is fallen off from *the principal* end of its institution; and every opinion, principle, or persuasion, that leads to the neglect of them, is *schismatical*.” And, in short, while some of our modern Independents treat with derision Presbyteries and Synods as they obtain among Presbyterians, and ask with triumph where we can discover such courts in scripture, the illustrious Owen, whose acquaintance with the scriptures was most probably not less profound and extensive than theirs, expressly declares them, “to be an institution of Christ, not in an express

“ command, but in the nature of the thing itself, *fortified*  
 “ *with apostolical example.*” And, again, that “ they are  
 “ consecrated unto the use of the church in all ages, by *the*  
 “ *example of the apostles*, in their guidance of the first  
 “ churches of the Jews and Gentiles ; which hath the force  
 “ of a *divine institution*, as being given by them *under the*  
 “ *infallible conduct of the Holy Ghost.*” In fine, he allows  
 that there may be not only lesser Synods, or meetings, as  
 the word signifies, of the pastors of churches in the same  
 communion ; but “ Synods that are greater, until, if occasion  
 require, and if it be expedient, there be a *General Assembly*  
 “ of them all, to advise about any thing wherein they are all  
 “ concerned.” It is obvious, then, that if our present In-  
 dependents sneer at Presbyterians when they affirm that such  
 courts are authorized by scripture, they must connect with  
 them, in their sneer, their own not less venerable predeces-  
 sors, Owen, and Cotton, and Hooker, and Goodwin, with  
 his six most respectable brethren in the Westminster As-  
 sembly. And while, in their superior wisdom, they look  
 down with pity upon Presbyterians in general when they at-  
 tempt to prove the authority of such courts from scripture,  
 and consider them as wresting the sacred oracles, they ought  
 undoubtedly to look *back* with the same regret and compas-  
 sion upon their *own erring forefathers*, who, less judicious  
 or candid than their more perfect children, unfortunately be-  
 lieved also in Presbyteries, and Synods, and General Assem-  
 blies—courts which, though but consultative, are not more  
 clearly demonstrable than those of Presbyterians are from  
 the word of God.

It may indeed be alleged, that these courts of review, for  
 which Dr. Owen contends, superior to the eldership of a  
 particular congregation, were warranted only to deliver an  
 advice to that individual church, but could not exercise over  
 it any authoritative rule. He affirms however, in common  
 with Goodwin, that if this particular congregation does not  
 comply with the decision of a Synod or Assembly, all the  
 churches, whose representatives sit in these courts, “ may  
 “ withhold communion from it.” Is not this however, by  
*whatever name* you call it, as much authority over this par-  
 ticular congregation, even by the pastors and members of  
 other churches, as is ever assumed by a Presbyterian Synod ?  
 and is not this the only difference between them, that the  
 Synods of the latter alone exercise this authoritative power,



while the members at large of the various churches represented in the Synods which were argued for by the former, together with the pastors, were to be vested with this power over that particular church? Do not many of the arguments of Dr. Owen moreover, whatever he designed, prove that the ministers of a number of churches, met in a Synod, have as much power over any church in a particular communion, which errs either in doctrine or discipline, as the governors of any particular congregation have over any member of that congregation, who walks unworthily of the Christian character? Nay, as was before remarked, does he not directly say, that “as a Christian is not only a member of a particular church, but, by virtue thereof, of the catholic church also, it is necessary (if he has been aggrieved by any decision of the men who govern the former) that he should be *heard and judged* as to his interest in the latter, if he do desire it? And does he not assert, that this can no way be done, but by *such Synods* as have been mentioned?” And, upon the whole, if it be doubted whether these considerations evince that Dr. Owen, while he reprobated an imperious and unreasonable authority, would have granted to Synods, over particular churches, a degree of authority equal to that which is intrusted to them by Presbyterians, let the following very strong and satisfactory testimony from his life be consulted. As the celebrated Whitefield, though by profession an Episcopalian, is reported to have declared, that of all the ecclesiastical constitutions on earth, that of the church of Scotland appeared to him the most excellent; so this great Independent has left an acknowledgment no less honourable to her Presbyterian administration and discipline, which proves that he must have agreed with her in her views of authority, while at the same time he contended, as her rulers also do, that none, who could not submit to the decisions of office-bearers in any particular instance, should be forced against their will to continue in the church. “I have been the larger,” says his biographer, in the account of him which is annexed to his book on Spiritual-mindedness, p. 456, “in this extract of the Doctor’s opinion about church-government, because it shews (whatever might have been his sentiments when younger) how much he agreed with *all Protestant churches*, that of England excepted, in this point, in the latter part of his days; and that had others been of his

“ mind, the difference betwixt those called Presbyterians  
 “ and Independents might easily have been reconciled. He  
 “ was of so healing a temper in this matter, that *I heard*  
 “ *him say*, before a person of quality, and others, *He could*  
 “ *readily join with Presbytery as it was exercised in Scot-*  
 “ *land\**.” It may perhaps be alleged however, that though

\* That such also were the sentiments of the Independents in Holland the country where, according to the testimony of Mosheim, (vol. v. p. 406), about two hundred years ago, congregational churches began to be formed, must be evident to any one who attends either to their writings or proceedings. The church at Rotterdam, for instance, as we are informed by Hoornbeek, in his *Summa Controversiarum cum Infidelibus, Hæreticis, et Schismaticis*, p. 778, having unjustly deposed one of their ministers, the church at Arnheim wrote to them—stated the offence which their conduct had given to the rest of their brethren—requested them to subject themselves, with all their proceedings, to the review of a Synod, which was to be called for that purpose—and told them, that such a Synod was to be summoned. The reason which they assign for it is, that “ no particular church, in any communion, ought to claim an exemption from giving an account of its conduct, or *being censurable by others* ;” so repugnant, say they, “ to our sentiments is that *independent liberty* which is commonly objected to us”—a liberty, however, in which the present Independents so much glory. This Synod having met in the city of Arnheim, and the members from Rotterdam having been summoned before them, the business was investigated for several days, and witnesses were examined and parties heard. A decision at last being given against the church, it publicly and humbly acknowledged its error, received its minister, after he too had confessed some fault which he had committed, and, having appointed a solemn day of fasting, humbled themselves before God and men on account of their sin. The words of Hoornbeek (and Goodwin and Nye, it may be remarked, were members of this Synod) are the following : “ Arn-  
 “ hemiensis cœtus scripsit ad Roterodamensem, significans datum  
 “ scandalum, ex temeraria ministri oppressione, et depositione,  
 “ quare ab iis petit paterentur in nomine Christi, et pro vindicando  
 “ ejus honore, atque in solatium oppressi ministri, causæ examen  
 “ coram reliquis suæ nationis ecclesiis, vel quibuscunque aliis hoc  
 “ ipsorum facto offensis, institui ; utque se subjicerent (ita loquun-  
 “ tur to subject themselves) *integræ totius negotii actorumque omnium*  
 “ *revisioni atque examini*. Quod ubi concessissent prompto lubentique  
 “ animo, et advenissent Arnhemii, quos supra diximus, in-  
 “ stitutusque conventus fuisset, præmissa adhortatione, quæ eo  
 “ spectabat ut docerent, singularem aliquam et particularem eccle-  
 “ siam, quæ sibi datam existimat a Christo judicandi eos qui ejus-  
 “ dem secum corporis ac societatis potestatem, non debere sibi  
 “ arrogare exemptionem a reddenda ratione, vel a censura aliorum (*an-*  
 “ *exemption from giving account, or being censurable by any other*), sive

such were the views of many ancient Independents respecting Presbyterian government, it is no argument why they should still be retained by us, if we are not convinced of their utility or truth. It is granted indeed, that our present Independents are certainly not bound, by the example of their forefathers, to admit any principle, or perform any duty towards God or man, however important, against their convictions. Such testimonies however in favour of Presbytery, from many of the greatest and most enlightened men that ever adorned their cause, ought to lead them at least to review their more levelling and democratic principles\* with diffidence and caution, and ought undoubtedly to teach them greater moderation and liberality than some of them have discovered in their language respecting the nature and tendency of a system, which many of their most distinguished ancient ornaments either *practically admitted*, or publicly commended.

“ *magistratus supra, - sive proximarum ecclesiarum juxta se. Tani*  
 “ *longe (dicunt) a mente nostra aberat independens illa libertas, quæ*  
 “ *nobis vulgo impingitur; etiam tum quando minima nobis a*  
 “ *regno Anglicano dependentia, vel revertendi eo spes videbatur.*  
 “ *Hic autem successus atque exitus Synodi illius fuit, ut, habita*  
 “ *aliquot dierum causæ cognitione, auditisque et examinatis variis*  
 “ *testibus, quomodo in curia aliqua ubi vel maxime auctoritate res*  
 “ *agitur, desiderari posset, cœtus qui offenderat, palam errorem*  
 “ *suum agnoverit, et ministrum, confessum etiam in quo forte ipse*  
 “ *peccaverat, restituerit in pristinum suum locum, indictoque*  
 “ *solemni jejunio, se coram Deo ac hominibus propter peccatum*  
 “ *illud suum humiliarit.”* How different indeed from the opinion of these original Independents are the tenets of those who now assume their name, most of whom are almost as much dissimilar to them as to *Presbyterians*, and many of whom, in their predilection for illiterate ministers, and virulence against churches of other denominations, resemble rather the *Boltonians* or *Brownists*, than those who were distinguished by the name of *Independents*!

\* I speak of their religious sentiments only.

## LETTER XIII.

SIR,

THAT it may not be imagined that this principle of Presbytery has no foundation but the authority of respectable names, I shall now endeavour to prove that it is established by the united evidence of reason and scripture.

The following quotations from Baillie and Ferguson, two ancient Presbyterians, contain, if I am not mistaken, a clear and accurate statement of the opposite views which have been taken of this question.

“Independents and Brownists,” says Baillie, in his *Dissuasive from the Errors of the Times*, “maintain that every particular church, every single congregation, is independent from any Presbytery, any Synod, any Assembly:” “This we deny, affirming the true dependence and subordination of parochial congregations to Presbyteries, and of these to Synods; to which we ascribe power, authority, and jurisdiction:” p. 197. “Independency is the full liberty of such a church (a particular congregation) to discharge all the parts of religion, doctrine, sacraments, discipline, and all within itself, without all dependence, all subordination to any other on earth, more or fewer, so that the smallest congregation, suppose of *three* persons\*, though it fall into the *grossest heresies*, may not be troubled by any orthodox Synod, were it œcumenic (or universal) of all the churches in the world:” p. 198.

“We come now,” says the other writer, p. 150, of his *Brief Refutation of the Errors of Independency, Separation, &c.* “to the *second head*, and it is that for which mainly they are called *Independents*: The point they affirm is this, that every particular church-session, or congregational eldership (or, according to others, congregation), is furnished with the *highest* power of church-government on earth, so that there is no power in the church above them to call them to an account, when they go wrong, to rescind any act once concluded, though it were never so unjust. They grant, that a Synod of ministers and elders

\* There are some of them in Glasgow which consist only of eight persons.

“ may meet to consult about matters\*, but withal affirm,  
 “ that they have no ecclesiastical power to command in the  
 “ Lord any congregation whatsoever: So that if a man be  
 “ wronged by a Session (or congregation); as for instance,  
 “ if he be unjustly censured (as it may very readily fall  
 “ out), he must sit with his wrong, *there is no power to*  
 “ *right it till Christ come in the clouds*: Or if a particular  
 “ congregation divide, turn heretics, run wrong (as many  
 “ of the *Independent* congregations do), there is no church-  
 “ power to heal the breach, unless it be by giving an advice,  
 “ which they may either follow, or not follow, as likes  
 “ them best. We again grant, that particular elderships  
 “ have a power from Jesus Christ to exercise discipline in  
 “ these things which concern *the congregation in particu-*  
 “ *lar*. But as for other things of more public concern-  
 “ ment, that is to say, things that concern other congrega-  
 “ tions as well as them, these ought to be handled by a  
 “ superior judicatory; and that even in those things of *par-*  
 “ *ticular concernment*, they are liable to appeals, and the  
 “ inspection of the superior judicatory; so that wherein  
 “ they shall be found wrong, partial, or erroneous, they may  
 “ be called to an account.

“ We allow unto particular congregations an eldership  
 “ and power of discipline within themselves, to judge of  
 “ these things that are of their *particular concernment*:  
 “ But as for things wherein other congregations are con-  
 “ cerned with them, we hold that such do belong to *supe-*  
 “ *rior judicatories*, according to the rule, *What belongs*  
 “ *unto all, should be handled by all*. Secondly, we do not  
 “ give power to *any one single congregation above another*:  
 “ We say, that *all congregations (the least as well as the*  
 “ *greatest)* are *equal* in power. We do only say, that all  
 “ *particular* congregations should be subject to a Presby-  
 “ tery, made up of elders taken from among themselves,  
 “ wherein no congregation can challenge power more than  
 “ another: the meanest hath as great power in them as the  
 “ greatest.”

\* You object to the propriety of these associations of ministers  
 being considered as the representatives of the churches to which  
 they belong, and propose that they should meet only in their pri-  
 vate characters, as an assembly of individuals, and not in their  
 public official capacity.



When it is affirmed by Presbyterians, that every particular congregation ought not to be independent of a Presbytery or Synod, it is not intended that its rulers, or office-bearers, are to be dependent upon them for the exercise of their power after they are invested with it, or that they may be deprived of it by them at pleasure, in that society which they govern. All that is designed is simply that they are subject, in any case of error, or any instance of mal-administration, to the authoritative review of the ministers and elders of a number of congregations met as a Presbytery; and, perhaps, it would be better, as the judicious Hoornbeek has observed, to express their relation to such a court by the terms *subjection* or *subordination*, than by the word *dependence*, which is occasionally used by some ancient Presbyterians\*.

\* The words of this very excellent and candid writer, in his book against schismatics, p. 771, deserve to be quoted. “ Quid-  
 “ nam vero hic tanti, iterum quæro, quod magnarum contentio-  
 “ num, et tumultuum causa esse debeat? quodque non vel tolerari  
 “ vel componi, si non corrigi facile possit? Ecclesiam particu-  
 “ larem habere omnem potestatem ecclesiasticam *in se*, neque *eam*  
 “ accipere a Synodo, vel ab aliis superioribus, certum est. Pone (verbi  
 “ causa) ut modo una particularis sit ecclesia, vel in mundo, vel in  
 “ aliqua parte mundi, vel ut non sint ecclesiæ, quæ sociari in unum  
 “ possint; aut quod aliqua cum iis sociari nequeat: non hæc eò  
 “ minus ecclesia est, vel mutila ideo aliqua sui parte, nedum essen-  
 “ tiali. Jam sociari in unum ecclesias, et convenire in Synodos,  
 “ haud improbant adversarii, tantum non deponere a Synodis. Et  
 “ si bene introspeciamus, *dependentia* a Synodis non congrue dicitur.  
 “ Quippe haud existimandum, vel ab aliis superioribus, aut eccle-  
 “ siis, aut Synodis, habere precariam potestatem particularem  
 “ quamque ecclesiam, vel se potestate sua exuere, quando in Sy-  
 “ nodo coit, illamque ei tradere. Neutiquam. Synodorum vel usus  
 “ vel potestas nihil officere potest aut debet ecclesiarum particula-  
 “ rium libertati et potestati, estque non *privativa*, sed *cumulativa*  
 “ potestas, ecclesiaque particularis quælibet manet subjectum pro-  
 “ prium et adæquatum *plene potestatis ecclesiasticæ*. Neque Synodi  
 “ in alias sub ea comprehensas ecclesias potestatem usurpent impe-  
 “ rantem, quæ dominorum et superiorum est in inferiores sibi sub-  
 “ ditos; sed ex communi et libero ecclesiarum consensu in Syno-  
 “ dum, hæc potestatem habet delegatam, et auxiliarem vel minis-  
 “ trantem, ecclesiis *voluntaria consensione*, ob necessitatem ordinis et  
 “ ædificationis, Synodis se subjicientibus. Uti quando in rebus-  
 “ publicis, vel alibi, ex communi æqualium consilio collegium  
 “ erigitur, ad quod communes causæ devolvuntur tractandæ et  
 “ definiendæ, quod in illas nullam habet potestatem, nisi earum ar-  
 “ bitrio et mutuo consensu. Quod in circulis vel diœcesibus ec-

The question then is, Whether every congregation, with its office-bearers, should be so independent as to be completely separate from every other in point of government? Or, while in ordinary matters it is governed by its elders, are they responsible for their conduct, in any case of error, to the ministers and elders of a number of congregations with whom they are associated in the same general body and religious fellowship? and are these again accountable to a still greater assembly, composed of the representatives of a greater number of churches, till at last they arrive at a universal meeting or council of the representatives of all the churches in the same religious connection, the highest court in the community?

That every congregation ought not thus to be separated, as is the case universally with Independent churches, appears to be manifest from the following arguments.

In the 1st place, The visible professing church, while comprehending many particular and distinct congregations, is represented in scripture as constituting one great and beautiful whole, one regular and closely connected society. It

“clesiarum, quare hac isti, illæ alteri Synodo se adjungant, et submittant, apparet. Non est ergo proprie hæc ecclesiarum ad Synodum relatio, *dependentia* dicenda, neque commode mihi vocabulo *Independentismi* vel denotata controversia, vel hominum secta videtur: nam bene dici potest, ecclesiam particularem esse independentem ab alia, vel a Synodis, aut hominibus; pendere autem a solo Christo: *submissio* potius appellanda fuerat, ut quæ venit ex communi consensu ecclesiarum, se illi ordini, ad ædificationem et bene esse ecclesiæ, subjicientium. A qua nomenclatura ipsos non admodum alienos futuros, et molliore verbo rem non malam facilius persuasum ipsis iri confidimus, quum in apologia dicentes audiverimus, suis se senioribus *subjectionem* prestare, et Synodi Roterodamensis sententiæ subjectionem a Roterodamensi cœtu postulatam, teneri ecclesiam submittere aliorum judicio et censuræ, &c. quæ facilius mihi videntur concilianda cum sententia nostra, quam cum nomine dependentiæ (quo offunduntur) vel potestatis usurpatæ a Synodo in ecclesias. Verum quid est quod adeo offendere eos possit, si Synodorum potestate ita explicata, et limitata, aliquam iis tribuamus? Censuram stringere incontumacem, pronunciare *non-communicationem*, quid vel ab excommunicatione adeo distat, vel ab usurpata potestate? illa non-communio passive considerata, quid differt ab excommunicatione? qui extra sanctorum communionem ponitur, annon idem est quod excommunicatus? vel ecclesia sic damnata non-communione, annon potestatem aliquam sentit adversus se exercitam? Certe magis videntur *verba* horrere, quam *rem*.”

is compared, for instance, in Rom. xi, to an *olive-tree*, for while some of the Jews, the ancient church of God, are said to have been cut off from it on account of their unbelief, the Gentiles, who are compared to a wild olive, are represented as grafted in among the branches which remained, and as admitted with them to partake of the juice and fatness of the olive-tree. It is often also exhibited under the emblem of a *body*, particularly in the twelfth chapter of 1st Corinthians. It is frequently distinguished also by the name of a kingdom, as will be evident to any one who examines the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. Nor is it merely, as Mr. Glass wishes to insinuate, the *invisible* church which is thus described. Of this church it is plain that there is a part in heaven; but the church here referred to, is one in which a variety of offices are instituted for its spiritual edification, and for converting sinners to obedience to the truth (1 Cor. xii. Eph. iv. 11, 12, 13), a circumstance undoubtedly which will not apply to the former. Besides, that it cannot merely be true believers, the mystical body of Jesus, who are there intended, as is asserted by that writer, seems evident from this, that, in the first of these passages, some of its members are said “to have been *cut off* from it “on account of their unbelief,” which cannot be alleged of true believers, unless the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints be rejected. In the second of these quotations, the apostle represents the church of which he speaks, as a church which, and which alone, had been enriched with supernatural gifts, as prophecy, miracles, the gift of tongues, &c. We know however, that these gifts were bestowed in the primitive times upon many who were not members of the invisible church or real believers, for we are told in Matth. vii. 22, 23, that in the day of judgment many will say unto Christ, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? “and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name “done many wonderful works? and yet that he will profess “unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that “work iniquity.” And, in the third of these passages, it appears to be no less undeniable, that it cannot be the regenerated and invisible church which is compared to a kingdom, for that kingdom is said there to resemble a field, in which there were tares as well as wheat, and in which these tares were to remain till the universal harvest, at the consummation of all things. In short, though the highest spi-

ritual characters be occasionally applied to this universal church, it will not prove that it is only the invisible church, consisting solely of believers, and not the visible church, of professing Christians, which is designed. It is the custom of the different apostles of Christ to describe men by what they profess to be, if there be nothing in their conduct which contradicts that profession, rather than from what they really are in the sight of God. Paul, we know, addresses *the whole* of the members of the churches of Rome, and Corinth, and Ephesus, and Thessalonica, as holy, and yet we have reason to suspect, that, if in the little company of our Saviour there was one traitor, all of them had not experienced regenerating grace. And Jesus himself, when addressing his disciples, and announcing to them promises of celestial glory, proceeds upon the same principle, and treats all of them, agreeably to their profession, as *genuine saints*, though he knew that one of them was a son of perdition. "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee," said Peter to him (Matth. xix. 27, 28): "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Not only so, but strong expressions are employed (1 Cor. xii), to point out the unity of this church, and the duties which result from it to the members at large. Nay, we are directly informed in the 25th verse, that God hath appointed all of them throughout the world, the lowest as well as the most eminent, to be united in one body for this particular end, that "there should be *no schism in the body*, but that "all the members of this universal church should have the same care one for another." But in what manner is it possible that these representations can be verified upon the Independent plan? Were all the congregations in the world composed of none but such as appeared to be saints, and yet were each of these disconnected from the rest in point of government, how could these descriptions be fulfilled? Would not every branch in this olive-tree be separated from every other? Would not every inferior community in this kingdom be cut off from the rest? and would not there be as many supreme independent principalities, each of them uncontrollable by any higher subordinate power upon earth, as there were individual societies? Would not every member

of this body be torn from the others? and, instead of there being no schism in the body, would it not, according to the very constitution of the church, be broken down into ten thousand incoherent fractions, all of which combined cannot take as much care of any particular society, to prevent them from erring, or exercise as much authority over them, if they persist in error, as is exercised by that society over any individual of its members? Since then it seems manifest, that the universal professing church of Christ is represented in scripture as a beautiful whole, as intimately connected as a body, or a kingdom, and in which all the congregations are required to take care of one another, that no schism may take place in it; and as this would be impracticable upon the Independent plan, if each of them was completely separated from the rest, and could not exercise over it the least authority; this plan must be considered as untenable, because subversive of the beautiful visible unity and order of the church.

Is it said, that all the Christian churches throughout the world may be viewed as united, because they have one faith, one hope, one spiritual baptism, one God and Father of all, and one bread and cup, of which they all participate? This will indeed demonstrate, that all true believers are *one mystical body*, but it is not about this union that we are now inquiring. It has been attempted to be proved, that were all the visible professing congregations on earth, to adhere to the doctrine and discipline of Christ, they would constitute what is denominated in the language of scripture, one olive-tree, one kingdom, and one body, all the members of which are invested with power to prevent any schism in it. Unless then all these churches could be conceived to be connected as far as it is possible in point of *government*, so that a congregation should be subject to the controul of the representatives of a number of congregations, the representations of scripture must be nugatory and unmeaning. Without this, no union of Christian churches could be witnessed; and though all the congregations on earth should be agreed in their views of doctrine and worship, if, as the Independent system supposes, they constituted innumerable detached societies, it seems impossible to conceive how, in any view, they could be denominated *one* visible church.

It is true, that this one universal church has never yet existed, but it does not follow that the plan which tends to



form it, is either useless or improper. The non-existence of this church arises from the corruptions and prejudices of men ; but supposing it to exist, the system of Independency would entirely destroy its unity and consistence. Besides, as far as the truth is disseminated and embraced, it appears required by the authority or at least by the representations of scripture, that all who are united in religious principle should connect themselves under the same government, and form one great and general church. It is not enough to assert, as Glass has done, that all congregations are no more bound to be subject to one great and general government, than to meet in one great assembly to partake of the Lord's supper. The latter, from the nature of things, is impossible, but experience has demonstrated the possibility of the former. Though all the congregations in Holland, France, Switzerland, or Scotland, could not assemble in one place to eat the supper, we know that the churches, in each of these countries, have been administered by a common government, while these congregations individually have also been governed by their particular rulers. In like manner, though the whole nation of Israel could not meet together to eat the passover, they were governed by a common council of seventy elders, while, in their particular districts, they were also subject to inferior rulers.

It is difficult to say what might, or might not, be practicable, if the church were absolutely universal. As all the nations in the world constitute one great political government to which every individual nation is subject, it is by no means impossible but there might be a general ecclesiastical government, composed of the representatives of the churches in every country, to which each of these churches should be subject. Such a general political government does not indeed *ostensibly* exist, but it is always understood to exist virtually, and has ever been considered as the safeguard of those general rights and laws which are called the rights and laws of nature and nations. When the energies of this government are at any time exerted, it may be said to assume a *visible* form : and it is this which constitutes and preserves the balance of power among nations. Why then might not a similar government exist in religion if the church were to become universal, to which the collected church in every particular country should be subordinate.

Nor does it follow, because it is difficult to conceive how such a government could exist even though there were a universal church, that, while it is not universal, the different congregations in a particular country, who are united in religious sentiment, ought not to be subject to one general government. Though all the nations, notwithstanding their subjection to a general virtual government, are not subject to it in a *permanent ostensible form*, would any one conclude from this, as Independents do respecting the church, that each nation should not possess within itself a certain fixed and general political government, or that there should be no rulers in any country superior to the magistrates of a particular town or burgh; that every such town should be a distinct and totally independent government; and that every individual, connected with this town, should be a virtual as well as a titular governor? What ought we to do then, but reject the Independent plan, which is so plainly subversive of the unity of the church, and conclude in general, that while every congregation should be governed by its distinct and separate rulers, there should be superior courts, to which all the congregations in the same connection are bound to be subject.

It may be said, indeed, that in political governments men are associated merely for the purpose of defence against foreign enemies. This, however, is but one end of their union; for the civil rights and privileges of every individual in the nation are also to be protected from being invaded. To accomplish this, they learn from experience that it would be dangerous in the extreme to commit to the rulers of every town or village a supreme and final juridical power, without the possibility of appeal to a higher court; and that consequently a gradation of courts is most expedient and necessary.

Still it will be affirmed, that though this arrangement is proper in political matters, it is not necessary or proper in the church of Christ, which is expressly declared to be a kingdom not of this world. It does not however follow from this particular expression, that there ought to be a total difference, *in every instance*, between the spiritual and the political kingdom. If it did, then, because order and government exist in politics, they ought not to exist in religion, but anarchy and disorder be allowed to prevail, a conclusion which few Independents would be disposed to

adopt. If then the kingdom of Christ, as it exists in the visible general church, does not necessarily differ, in every point, from political kingdoms, the question naturally occurs, Are *these* some of the instances in which this similarity may take place; that every member is not to be admitted to judge and vote on every proposal of the rulers in a particular church, as every man in a city is not permitted to judge and vote on every measure of the magistrate; and that it would be improper for every congregation to possess an independent ecclesiastical government, accountable to no higher court, as it would be improper and dangerous that every town should have a political government independent of any superior?

In determining this question, it seems fair and reasonable to appeal not only to scripture but to experience. If then, on the authority of experience, it appears that men in every age have been so *unqualified* to decide on political questions, that it has been accounted at once dangerous and preposterous to submit every measure of the governors of a city to the decision of the citizens before it is adopted, it seems equally just to maintain that in a congregation, where the subjects of discussion are unquestionably more interesting, and where the members at large, are perhaps, as really unqualified to decide, it must be no less preposterous to subject every measure of government to the review of the people before it be put in execution. And if it has also been accounted prejudicial to the civil interests of men, to constitute every town in a kingdom an independent principality, uncontrollable by any higher juridical court, may we not legitimately infer that a similar independency, given to a particular congregation, would be equally prejudicial to the religious interests of men? Unless then it can be proved, that Christians at large are better fitted to be ecclesiastical governors than civil judges; or that a particular congregation is less liable to err than the governor or magistrates of a city; or that, though they may err as frequently, the consequences of their improper decisions, with regard to *religion*, are of less importance than those which arise from political errors; the reasoning seems fair and the conclusion unavoidable, even though we grant the favourite position of Independents, that the church, or kingdom of Christ, is not of this world.

I know it has been affirmed by Glass, that when the professing church of Christ is represented in scripture as *one*, a

particular congregation only is intended, and that the unity even of the church universal may be ascribed to this congregation, because it is an image of the whole catholic church. In proof of this he tells us, that “the apostle Paul, in some passages, accommodates his doctrine of the unity of the holy catholic church, the mystical body of Christ, unto a visible church, a congregation of saints, wherein that catholic body is shewed forth; and exhorts the members, in their several stations, to walk according to it, and shew it forth: Eph. ii. 22. Rom. xii. 6.—10. Eph. iv. 1, 2, 3. 1 Cor. xii. 27.\*” In some even of these passages, however, it seems plain that it is the *universal visible church*, and not merely a particular congregation, to which unity is attributed. Thus, in Rom. xii. 6, &c. the apostle not only speaks in general terms of the offices in the church, but includes himself, though he had never yet been at Rome, and was not a member of the particular church there. Besides, even Glass allows, that, in ver. 4, 5, he speaks of the universal church; consequently, since it is his design, ver. 3, to inculcate the exercise of humility on all Christians, and especially the office-bearers of the church (and to enforce it, he introduces a striking and beautiful allusion to the relation in which all believers stand to each other as members of the general or universal church,) is it not evident that his inference, in ver. 6, relates to the universal church alone, which he there represents as one. That it was this church alone which he intended in 1 Cor. xii, is proved from what is stated in the 28th verse. It was certainly not merely in a single congregation at Corinth, but in the universal professing visible church, that “God had set some, first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers,” &c. That it is the same universal church, of the unity of which he speaks, Eph. iv. 1, 2, 3, is no less clear from the following context. In short, allowing that, in *some occasional* passages, particular churches, as that of Ephesus, (Eph. ii. 22), are represented to us as constituting *one church*, it will not prove that, in *other* passages, the universal professing church is not as expressly pointed out as constituting also *one church*. That it is so described, we have already attempted in some measure to demonstrate, and, were it necessary, it might be established from other passages also. At present we shall

\* Glass's Works, vol. i. p. 279.

only farther remark, that in this light it seems to be very pointedly exhibited in the account of the millennial church : Rev. xxi. This church certainly cannot mean the invisible church, for we are informed, ver. 24, that the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honour into it ; and in ver. 26, that they should bring into it also the glory and honour of the nations. And that it cannot signify a single congregation is no less plain, for nations are represented, ver. 24, as walking in the light of it, and kings of different countries as members of it, which certainly will not apply to any single congregation. It can only then be the universal visible church ; yet it is described as constituting one great and beautiful whole, for it is pointed out to us under the emblem of a city, and a person. It is evident then, that even allowing that unity is sometimes ascribed to a particular congregation in the sacred volume, it is no less certainly attributed to the universal church. And if the unity of a particular congregation would be destroyed by completely separating the members from each other, and rendering them independent of the authority of the whole, the unity of the universal church must be no less destroyed by separating every particular congregation which composes this church, and making it independent of the controul of the rest, in any case of error, in point of government.

To conclude, is it objected, that though unity belongs to the universal church as well as to a particular congregation, yet it is the latter which is always meant when unity is ascribed to the visible professing church ; and that this may well be affirmed even of a particular congregation, because it is an image of the universal church of Christ, so that, upon perceiving it, we perceive a representation of this whole catholic society ? It is replied, that since every individual saint, or believer, is represented in scripture as made at last, by the grace of God, a perfect man, and is an image of the whole mystical body of Christ, upon the same principle it might be affirmed, that when Christ's mystical body also is denominated by Paul, (Eph. iv. 13), a perfect man, it is only a *single Christian* which is there intended by him. And since every particular believer, when sanctified by the grace of God, becomes to him a spiritual temple, and is a delightful image of the whole universal church, which is distinguished also by that name, upon the same principle it might be argued, that when the universal church, as in



Eph. ii. 21, is represented as a temple, it is only an *individual Christian* which is designed by the apostle. But if Independents themselves would consider it as unfair, were we to maintain that when the universal mystical church is described in scripture as a perfect man, and a spiritual temple, individual believers alone are intended, because they are images of the former, and are called also by these names, must it not be equally unfair and unreasonable in them, to assert, that though the universal visible church is pointed out in scripture as constituting one regular and connected whole, it is only a particular congregation which is designed, because unity also is sometimes attributed to such congregations, and because, when we behold the latter, we contemplate an image and emblem of the former?

How, moreover, even upon the principle of this objection, can a particular congregation be a representation of the universal visible church, if that church is not united under one common government? The society which is the image of the other in miniature is unquestionably connected under such a government, and by this alone is constituted a church. But how can it be a public and visible emblem of this greater society, if the constituent parts of the latter are not united under such an administration, and have not even the connection which subsists among the different members of such a congregation?

## LETTER XIV.

SIR,

HAVING, in the preceding Letter, endeavoured to establish from the representations of scripture, that such a unity ought to exist among Christian congregations as is inconsistent with the plan of Independent churches, I shall now confirm this position by shewing,

2dly, That if every congregation is made so independent of every other, that corruptions and improprieties may be admitted in them without being accountable to any superior court on earth, much greater opportunity must exist for the introduction of error, and tyranny, than on the Presbyterian system.

That the errors or corruptions of a congregation are much more prejudicial to the interests of religion in the world than those of individuals does not admit of dispute. In proportion, therefore, to their magnitude and tendency ought to be the strength and efficacy of the means of preventing or suppressing them. On the Independent plan however, if a congregation depart from purity of faith or worship, the same means cannot be applied to reclaim it, as can be employed by its rulers to reclaim or punish the corruptions of its individual members. In the latter case, they can be admonished, rebuked, and, if they persist in their errors, excommunicated by the rulers. But no such power can be exercised over a whole congregation, nor any such punishment inflicted on it, notwithstanding the greater enormity and more baneful tendency of its errors. Nay, even though a number of congregations should be seduced or misled by their example, the contagion must remain uncontrolled by either censure or punishment: and thus our Lord, who has appointed the exercise of discipline towards offending individuals, has allowed congregations to become corrupt without the possibility of recovering them.

In Presbytery, on the contrary, a congregation is as much under the discipline of its superior court as the members are under that of its particular rulers; and even though all the congregations under the review of a Presbytery should err, they may be punished by a Synod; which, on falling into

similar errors with the inferior judicatories, may be punished by the supreme court. While Independency therefore provides for the punishment of the least faults, or those of members, it overlooks the most pernicious and more important faults, the heresies and corruptions which may take place in *congregations* : by consequence, as inattention to *the greatest crimes* is one of the most radical and important defects in any government, the principles of Independency must be prejudicial to the general interests of religion.

Do you say, that congregations may admonish one another when they fall into error, and endeavour to reclaim them? You allow, however, that unless there be a power of punishing as well as of admonishing an offending member, the evils which he may introduce can neither be prevented nor removed. On what principle, then, can you refuse a similar power to be necessary for the prevention or suppression of offences committed by a whole congregation? In reply to this it is not sufficient to say with Glass, that though a congregation is not subject to the ecclesiastical censures of any external court, spiritual judgments may be inflicted on it by God ; for these may descend on the individual members of a congregation also, yet the authority of discipline is considered as essential to the government of every congregation. Or is it said, that a corrupt congregation, though not subject to the judgment of men, will finally be judged at the tribunal of Christ. The same answer is satisfactory—that the same is the accountableness, and the same will be the judgment, of every individual who persists in his sin. Yet even Independents admit the necessity of discipline in the case of individuals : Can *less* then, it is still demanded, be necessary to prevent error and corruption in a whole congregation than in the case of an individual? Undoubtedly not ! Independency, therefore, must be more favourable to the introduction of evils than Presbytery is, which, to every check which Independency possesses, adds the accountableness of every congregation to its superior court, and the review of all decisions, in inferior judicatories, by a still higher and supreme council.

In opposition to this you however remark, p. 53. “ So far do we conceive Presbyterian government from being an arrangement conducive to general utility, that it appears quite the reverse. It tends to propagate corruption, and to prevent reform. Suppose a church, on the Pres-

“ byterian model, at first comparatively pure (as it is generally supposed, perhaps in some cases justly, that churches in their early days are), but by degrees corruption creeps into it. As soon as that corruption infects the majority, from the power which Presbytery gives them over the rest, they can force their purer brethren, however reluctantly, to assimilate themselves to their corrupt standard. If, for example, in a Presbytery, one congregation after another begins to lose sight of Christian discipline; whenever the greater part of that Presbytery does so, the rest, however much disposed, can no longer maintain it. If an individual, in one of these purer congregations, feel himself aggrieved, an appeal to the majority secures him redress. The system then tends to drag down those who would act on Christian principles to a conformity to such as have departed from them. Again, it equally tends to prevent reform. If, amidst general corruption, a spirit of reform should appear in a single congregation, the authority of the rest is a bar in its way. This is, we believe, in some cases severely felt. Suppose a minister in the established church (and in some instances, we trust, it is not merely matter of supposition), in the progress of his inquiries respecting Christian discipline, is convinced that it is very partially, if at all maintained in his congregation, admitting even that a majority of his people held the same sentiments; is it not obvious, that unless the Presbytery in general were of a similar opinion, any attempt at reform in that congregation would prove nugatory and vain. The same inconvenience does not attend Independent churches. We are far from insinuating that any form of church-government presents an effectual bar to that corruption to which all institutions, conducted by depraved and fallible men, are liable; but admitting among Independent churches the most general departure from Christian principles to prevail, if, in the midst of this, an individual congregation is led to study greater purity, the system at least presents no external obstacle to counteract it.”

On this objection, so formidable in your apprehension, I observe in general, that while you point out as clearly as possible what you imagine to be the tendency of the Presbyterian system to propagate corruption and prevent reform, you forget to shew that Independency is free from a similar

tendency. Even on the principles of the reasoning which you adopt, it appears to be much more liable to this objection than Presbytery. Suppose, for instance, a congregation, in either of these connections, just beginning to swerve from purity of faith and worship, and consider the tendency of each of these systems to prevent or reform them. Independency has not a single court which can call it to account, censure or punish it: Presbytery has superior courts, to whose tribunal it is amenable, and which can censure or punish it with as much power as an Independent congregation can any of its offending members. Nay, suppose this congregation to extend its corruption to ten or twenty churches around it, the same want of authority and power to check the progress of this corruption exists. But in Presbytery, though twenty congregations should be tainted with error, there are higher courts, which can endeavour to reform them, not only by admonition and persuasion, but by superadding the same ecclesiastical censures which Independents inflict on the individuals in a particular congregation who persist in error. In a word, in a country where there were 1600 Independent churches, though almost the one half of them should fall into error, and obstinately persist in it, for any power that the remaining majority possess, they must continue unpunished; corruption must be allowed to extend without controul; they must be left to themselves, either to reform, or to advance in corruption. In a Presbyterian church however, though as many should become corrupt, the faithful majority can exercise the discipline over them with which they are invested; employ the same efficacious means for their reformation which you acknowledge Christ has appointed to be used by a congregation towards its members; and if they should resist these means, finally pronounce on them the same sentence to which you also allow individuals are exposed. I am truly astonished then, that while such is the nature of Presbytery, when administered according to its original design and by faithful men, that it is as much fitted to exclude corruption from the most extensive church, or to reform it, as the government established in your connection is to prevent the corruption of a particular individual, you should endeavour to represent Presbytery as so favourable to error, and so inimical to reform. Nor am I less surprised, when you attempt to insinuate that this charge does not strike with its utmost force



against Independency—a system which gives no authority except to a single congregation over its own members; under which, a hundred congregations may embrace the most pernicious opinions, and persist in them without censure and without punishment.

You indeed ask, (p. 51), “How does Presbytery tend to prevent corruption? Not by admonition and persuasion. These, indeed, it does not exclude, but this is a kind of influence which is acknowledged in its fullest latitude by Independent churches; and therefore respecting the propriety of adopting it there is no dispute. The stern tone of authority, then, is the only method of preventing corruption by which Presbytery is distinguished. It indeed, like other modes of compulsion, may produce hypocrisy, but it can never promote spiritual obedience. It was never a kind of influence sanctioned by Him who reigns over a willing people.”

Presbyterian courts however, as was already proved, while they employ authority, use also admonition and persuasion. Nor is their authority more stern or compulsory than that which is exercised by the office-bearers and members of an Independent congregation over an offending brother. Do not the governors of such a congregation add to the means of advice and persuasion a higher act of authority, by inflicting on him a most awful punishment, if he remain incorrigibly obstinate? And is the authority of a Presbyterian court, over an offending congregation, greater than this, or more incompatible with the use of persuasion and advice? Is it more calculated to produce hypocrisy, as you are so charitable as to allege? Is it more inconsistent with the influence which is sanctioned by Him who reigns over a willing people? Or on what principle can you explain the extraordinary difficulty attending the Independent system, that while a power to punish a particular member is allowed to be necessary for preserving the purity of the congregation to which he belongs, a similar power is denied to a superior court, and a whole congregation suffered to embrace the most dangerous opinions without the possibility of being censured or punished?

You will, however, probably say, that as soon as the majority in a Presbyterian connection become corrupt, all the evils which you describe are found to be realized. It is true, indeed, that, when perverted from its origin design,

like many other things which in themselves are good, Presbytery may produce the worst of consequences ; and it is even granted, that as, when properly and conscientiously administered, it is productive of greater good than Independency, when corrupted and misapplied, it may, in one view, be attended with greater evils. The question, however, in the present discussion, certainly is, not what system, when perverted from its original end, is calculated to produce the *least evil*, but what system, when conducted according to its design, is calculated to produce the greatest good ? Your objection is therefore completely irrelevant, because it rests on a mistake about the point in dispute, as well as on a principle long exploded by scripture, philosophy, and common sense, that *the abuse of a thing is a valid argument against its utility*.

By adopting this principle, you invalidate the authority of the most important institutions, and set aside many in which you yourself firmly believe. On this ground, for instance, as a *standing ministry*, when prostituted to the purposes of error and worldliness, is much more fitted to disseminate corruption and prevent reform than *private instruction* is, it should be laid aside ; and we ought to believe, with a certain sect of levellers, that ministers of the gospel are no longer necessary, but every Christian himself should teach his neighbour, and every Christian his brother, to know the Lord. On the same ground also, since *civil government*, when administered by rulers who are unfaithful, is no less fitted, by its subordination of courts, to propagate most extensively *every species of corruption*, and to present an unsurmountable obstacle to reform, it ought to be laid aside ; and all the nations of men, correcting those errors into which, by your reasoning, they have in every age fallen, should at once abolish their civil courts of review, break down their kingdoms into a countless multitude of little principalities, and make each of them entirely independent of the rest. Without this you may allege, against the present constitution of almost every nation on earth, as you do against Presbytery, that as soon as corruption infects the majority in the superior courts, from the power with which they are invested over the rest, they can force their purer brethren, however reluctantly, to assimilate themselves to their corrupt standard. If, for example, in a kingdom, one city after another, and one ruler after another, begin to lose

sight of political justice ; whenever the greater part of the rulers in the superior courts of the kingdom does so, the rest, however much disposed, can no longer maintain it. If a degenerate individual, in one of the purer cities, feel himself aggrieved by the decision of its rulers, an appeal to the majority, in the superior courts, secures the immediate reversal of their sentence. This system, then, tends to drag down those who would act on the principles of equity to a conformity to such as have departed from them. Again, it equally tends to prevent reform. If, amidst general political corruption in a kingdom, a spirit of reform should appear in the governors of a single city, the authority of the rest is a bar in its way. This, we believe, in such cases, would be severely felt. Suppose the governors of some of these cities (and in some instances, we trust, even in corrupt kingdoms, it is not merely matter of supposition), in the progress of their inquiries respecting political justice, are convinced that it is very partially, if at all maintained in their cities—admitting that even a majority of the people held the same sentiments ; is it not obvious, that unless the superior courts in general were of a similar opinion, any attempt at reformation, in any of these cities, would prove nugatory and vain. The same inconvenience would not follow, were every kingdom upon earth, however, split down into as many independent political societies as there were cities, or towns, or villages in it. We are far from insinuating that any form of political government presents an effectual bar to that corruption to which all institutions, conducted by depraved and fallible men, are liable ; but admitting among these independent political societies the most general departure from the principles of justice and integrity to prevail, if, in the midst of this, an individual village, or town, or city, is led to study greater rectitude, the system at least presents no external obstacle to counteract it. If then, you would not maintain that civil government, in every form almost in which it at present exists in the world, is absurd and pernicious, because, when its administrators are depraved, it is capable, as extensively as Presbytery itself, by its courts of review, to propagate corruption and prevent reform ; on what principle, I demand, can you assert that Presbytery, with its courts of review, is dangerous and reprehensible, because, when the majority of its administrators may differ from you in their views of doctrine and their ideas of dis-

cipline, they have it in their power to propagate what you would distinguish by the name of corruption, and prevent reform? And if, notwithstanding the evils which may be occasioned by a *perverted use* of the former, you would not contend that every town or village in our native country, and even in every country, should be converted into an *independent political* government, on what grounds can you conclude, from the possible evils which *may* result from the *perverted use* of the latter, especially as liberty of separation is acknowledged by it, that the church at large should be broken down into *independent religious* societies, and that there should be as many *independent ecclesiastical governments* as there are individual congregations on the face of the earth?

The great object of inquiry in our examination of different forms of government, sacred or civil, should undoubtedly be, which of them, when acted upon *according to its end*, is best fitted to prevent *the entrance* of corruption among societies as well as individuals; not, which of them is most calculated, when *misapplied from that end*, and conducted by men whose principles and practice may appear to us to be wrong, to be productive of *the greatest evil*? Examining then, by this standard, the opposite schemes of Presbytery and Independency, I think it is manifest from the preceding remarks, that the preference is certainly due to the former. If conscientiously managed, by men who experience the influence of the gospel, the rulers of each of its individual congregations can exercise towards all as much strictness of discipline as the most zealous governors of any Independent society can exercise towards their members. And, at the same time, while Independency has not a single court which can judge or punish a *whole erring congregation*, but allows them, though they should proceed to the most dreadful extremes of error or depravity, to pass uncensured by any ecclesiastical tribunal, Presbytery has courts which can inflict upon any obstinate offending congregation, or even a hundred such congregations, the same salutary punishment, to reclaim and reform them, which Independents can inflict upon any individual of their members. And, upon the whole, while Independency, as was already demonstrated in the *second* of these Letters, has not a single court which can procure redress to any of its members, though he be treated with the *utmost cruelty* and *tyranny* by any of its

congregations, Presbytery, by its courts, when they are conducted upon the principles of equity and fidelity, presents to the poorest individual in a congregation a mean of immediate and complete satisfaction, even for *the least act of injustice* by a Session, or Presbytery, or a whole Synod. From these views, then, I still maintain that the Presbyterian system ought unquestionably to be preferred to that of Independency, and that the latter should be set aside as inimical to the dearest rights and privileges of Christians as individuals, as well as the united interests of the whole church of God.

In the 3d place, It is a principle revealed in scripture, and a principle acknowledged by you as well as many Independents, that *ministers alone* are authorized to ordain. Now, if an Independent congregation be destitute of pastors, and if, after they are chosen by the people, agreeably to scripture and the uniform practice of your sister-churches, ministers be brought from other congregations to ordain them to their charge, is not this a *practical* renunciation of that first principle of Independency which we are now examining, and a subjecting the congregation over which they are placed, together with the pastors, to the performance of a most important act of government by the ministers of churches entirely different? Is not this confessedly an act of administration as interesting as any which is performed even among Independents, and yet is it not discharged to any congregation which solicits it, by persons who are neither ministers nor members of that congregation? Besides, does it not involve in it the exercise of all inferior branches of authority? Is it not plain that if it is their province to set apart these members of this other congregation to the work of the ministry, it is their province also to examine them as to their fitness to be invested with that office, for, without this, will it not follow that if a congregation has erred in its choice of pastors, ordination by the former will only tend to confirm their error, and admit those who are totally unqualified to this important function? And does not the scripture declare, that when candidates for the ministry are ordained by ministers, hands are not suddenly to be laid upon them; that they must be satisfied as to their qualifications, and must personally be convinced that they are faithful men, able to teach others the doctrines of the gospel? But if every pastor of such a congregation must submit to the scrutiny of



the pastors and office-bearers of *other* congregations before he is ordained, even *after he has been chosen by the vote of the people*, is not this recognising the right of these pastors to exercise a very important act of authority over him and the congregation? Is it not investing them with all the power of a *court of review*, while yet they are unwilling to grant them the name? And is it not obvious, that if the pastors alone of other congregations can ordain a person to the work of the ministry in a congregation which is totally destitute of pastors, it is to them alone that he can be amenable for any act of mal-administration which he may be permitted to commit; and is it by them alone that he can be deposed, if he walk unworthily of his sacred function. In fine, though it should not be admitted by some Independents, that a meeting of the ministers of *other* churches is *necessary* for the ordination of the pastor or minister of a particular congregation, yet if it be granted, with others of them, to be *lawful* and desirable, it seems undeniably to follow, in opposition to a favourable principle of Independency, that ordination is either not an act of government, or that it is lawful and desirable even among Independents, that a congregation, in many instances, should be subject to one of the highest acts of power that can be exercised by the ministers and office-bearers of other congregations? Since then it appears to be evident from the sacred volume, that ministers alone are authorized to ordain\*, and since it

\* That ministers alone can ordain ministers, was attempted to be proved in a former Letter. In addition to the arguments which were then stated, it was neglected to be mentioned that considerable stress has been laid by some, for the confirmation of this sentiment, upon the appointment of Paul, and his fellow-labourer Barnabas, to an important mission, as related in the thirteenth chapter of the Acts. Even admitting it has been said, with some advocates for lay-preaching, that it is not their ordination to the office of the ministry, but simply their being set apart to a particular work, which is there referred to, yet as it is evident that they were thus set apart by ministers of the gospel, and them alone (compare ver. 1, and 3), the argument which is presented by it, for the right of ministers alone to ordain, must be doubly stronger. If ministers alone can set apart those who are already ordained to a particular work, much more must it be manifest that they alone can perform this *higher* work, and invest them with their office. At any rate, it seems plain that the observation of Mr. Ewing, which has been represented by some as completely invalidating any such conclusion from this passage, is unjust and contradictory. "It is remark-

is admitted by many of our modern Independents, that it is either *lawful* or *necessary* that they alone should perform this act, it seems to be an unavoidable consequence, if they would be consistent either with scripture or with themselves, that each of their congregations is not to be *independent* in every instance, but that, in many cases, it is either *lawful* or *necessary* that it should be subject to one of the highest acts of authority by the ministers and office-bearers of *other* churches.

In the 4th place, If the pastors of a particular congregation become heretical or immoral, and persist in these evils, in *another* point of light, even upon *Independent* principles, a court of review appears necessary to *judge* them. The members of the congregation, according to the acknowledged tenets of all Independents, are not entitled in the first instance to judge, but are merely allowed to *acquiesce* and *consent* to the proposals of their office-bearers. But if not *a single office-bearer* is left in the congregation who retains his authority, how can the members take cognizance of their pastors, since it is their province only to express their *concurrence* in the proposals of their office-bearers, and not nominally themselves to act as *judges*? Is it said, that they may withdraw from the ministration of these pastors? It is

“able,” says he, p. 6, of his Remarks upon a Sermon published by Mr. Dick, “that wherever ordination, by the instrumentality of *man*, is spoken of, the words are quite different from that which is used in the text before us; whereas when any word at all related to the one in the text occurs, in the sense of ordination, it uniformly signifies the ordination or sovereign appointment of God.” Are we not expressly told in the beginning of this chapter, that while “certain prophets and teachers ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said to *them*, Separate me Barnabas and Paul, for the work whereunto I have called *them*?” And would not any unprejudiced person, who looked no farther *than the present passage*, suppose, upon the first perusal of these verses, that it was an appointment, or separation, by men, and not by God, which was here intended by this expression? If Mr. Ewing’s very bold and unqualified assertion however, respecting the separation which is here mentioned, even though but to a particular mission, be admitted to be just, the following must be the meaning of the inspired historian: “While these prophets and teachers ministered and fasted, the Holy Ghost appeared to them, and commanded *himself* to *separate* to *himself* Barnabas and Paul” — a supposition at once the most absurd and ridiculous, and no less inconsistent with the character of Luke as a man of sense, than with his more extraordinary endowments as an evangelist.

replied, that this measure cannot consistently be adopted till their pastors be tried, and be proved to be guilty. But how can this be done, if there be no court superior to a particular congregation? Besides, it is evident that pastors, who persist in heresy or immorality, are not only to be deprived of the particular charge over which they are placed, but are solemnly to be deposed, as no longer ministers of the gospel of Christ. But if there be no court superior to a particular congregation; who are the persons that are thus to depose them, if they persist in these evils, allowing that this congregation has withdrawn from their ministrations?

And 5thly, If every particular congregation, however small, is, in every case, to be the final judge in every point of government, this plan seems to be less fitted to secure an enlightened and candid administration than that of Presbytery.

Let it be supposed for a moment (and nothing less can be supposed, to give justice to the argument), that Presbyterian ministers are as pious and zealous for the interests of religion as the members of any Independent congregation, and see which of these plans is most happily calculated to provide an enlightened and impartial administration. In the one case, a congregation of twenty, or thirty, or fifty members, a great proportion of whom are frequently persons of feeble powers and limited information, are to be the ultimate judges in every business, however difficult and important and no court upon earth can either amend or reverse their decision. In the other, it is either determined by the wisest and most judicious of a particular congregation, together with the minister, under the review and controul of the wisest and most judicious of *twenty*, or a *hundred*, or *several hundred* congregations, together with the pastors; or it is this assembly itself which finally determines it. And, in the one case, it is decided by a little assembly, who "are more apt," as you acknowledge, p. 52, "to be influenced by party-spirit, by personal animosity, or by local prejudice." In the other, it is determined by this large assembly, the members of which, from their distance, their equal relation to the parties, and their previous freeness from personal dislike, to which those who reside upon the spot, in your opinion, may be exposed, are much more likely, as you honestly confess, to be candid and unbiassed. Whatever then may be *the conduct* of Presbyterians and Independents,

it appears to be undeniable, that when we consider their different forms of government, on the supposition that the administrators of them are *equally faithful* and *equally conscientious*, the scheme of the former is much better fitted than that of the latter to secure, in difficult and important matters, an enlightened and candid dispensation of justice.

Is it said, that the members of a particular congregation are much more likely to be qualified to judge in matters which relate to itself, than the most numerous assembly of learned, and pious, and experienced men who live at a distance? It is answered, that if their judgment be fair and equitable, it ought to be founded upon nothing but what is publicly stated and fully canvassed; and may not all that information which is openly communicated before a whole congregation be communicated also before such an assembly, who, by your own confession, will be more candid and unprejudiced? Besides, as is observed by Mr. Wood (against Lockier, p. 320.) “ In addition to the businesses of the  
“ exercise of discipline about particular members of con-  
“ gregations, there are, first, Matters of faith and of the  
“ worship of God to be defined from the word of God;  
“ and contrary errors, heresies, and corruptions, to be con-  
“ demned and declared against. Secondly, There are mat-  
“ ters of external order and policy, which are determined by  
“ the true light of nature, right reason, and general rules in  
“ scripture. Now, I do not think that Independents will  
“ take it upon them to aver, that a single congregation are  
“ like in reason to be more learned, and so more advantaged  
“ to judge in matters of this kind, than all the able choice  
“ men, ministers and elders from many congregations, as-  
“ sembled together in a Synod, or in a Classical Presbytery.  
“ In the third place, To insinuate that in businesses of dis-  
“ cipline about particular persons there is no other matter  
“ to be cognosced and determined but *questions of fact*, is  
“ another mistake. For oftentimes in such businesses are  
“ involved intricate questions of law (or *juris*), as frequent  
“ experiences in the exercises and processes of discipline,  
“ prove daily. Now although it be true that a particular  
“ congregation is like to be more learned, as to matters of  
“ mere fact in businesses of particular members; yet it can  
“ hardly be said in reason, that it is like they will be more  
“ learned in questions of law involved therein, than many  
“ choice able men from many congregations. And fourthly,



“ Suppose the members of a particular congregation may be  
 “ more learned in the businesses which relate to themselves,  
 “ yet I suppose (that which is not unusual to fall out) there  
 “ may be differences among the elders, or between the elders  
 “ and the people, or both may be divided in their judg-  
 “ ments that nothing can be concluded amongst them :  
 “ what will you have done in such a case?” Or is it re-  
 marked farther, that though it may be expedient, from these  
 things, to convene meetings as numerous as possible of the  
 ministers and office-bearers of other congregations to obtain  
 their advice, yet it would be utterly improper that a parti-  
 cular congregation should submit to their authority, but  
 that it ought still to retain the power of decision? It is de-  
 manded, in reply, whether it can be so conducive to the in-  
 terests of truth and equity to vest such a power of final de-  
 termination in those whom you admit to be “ *more apt* to  
 “ be influenced by party-spirit, by prejudice, or by per-  
 “ sonal animosity,” than to commit it to this more candid  
 as well as more enlightened assembly? If these circumstan-  
 ces, in the one case, render it dangerous and prejudicial to  
 the cause of justice that they should *themselves* determine  
 without convening this assembly, and soliciting its advice,  
 must they not render it also no less hazardous to it, that the  
 power of supreme and ultimate decision should be vested in  
 them, though they should retain their prejudices after all  
 that he said to them? Even upon your own principles  
 then, it appears to be undeniable, that the plan of Presby-  
 tery, in this view also, is better fitted than that of Indepen-  
 dency to provide at once for a more enlightened, and safe,  
 and candid administration of ecclesiastical justice.

Besides, if any of the members of a particular congrega-  
 tion exhibit a charge against the rest of that congregation,  
 and there be no superior court; who are the arbiters that are  
 to determine between them? Both are *parties*, and both  
 consider themselves as equally aggrieved, and consequently,  
 by the rules of all consistent governments, are totally dis-  
 qualified from judging in the difference. But upon the In-  
 dependent plan, they are themselves the only persons who  
 can act as arbiters; and, this office, as was observed, since  
 there is no superior judicatory, they must still perform, even  
 though both are interested. Among Presbyterians however,  
 when any members of a congregation are injured by those  
 who are its elders or governors, they can summon these el-



ders to a superior court, which, if composed of upright and disinterested men, will judge impartially between both the parties. Nay, if this superior court still seem to determine amiss, they can appeal to a third, till at last they arrive at the highest subordinate court in the church. Thence, indeed, if still denied a favourable decision, they can appeal to no superior tribunal upon earth ; but this arises only from the imperfection of the present state of existence, which grants not to any, during their earthly lives, when aggrieved by a supreme tribunal among men, to appeal to and obtain an audible verdict from the throne of God. Nor is this imperfection peculiar to ecclesiastical—it is common to it also with civil government. Among Independents, on the contrary, in the *very first instance*, when the minority are injured by the majority of a congregation, the only persons who can judge of their complaint, are the very men who have committed the wrong ; and whether such a plan is as well fitted as that of Presbytery, when faithfully administered, to provide for a candid dispensation of justice, it is left to the unprejudiced observer to say.

So far however, according to some, are these benefits from being the consequences of an enlightened and faithful administration of Presbytery, that the opposite evils, however it may be exercised, seem necessarily to result from it. “ Farther,” says Dr. Watts, in his *Candid Inquiry*, p. 175, before quoted, “ to keep judges and party entirely distinct, “ hath been always an object to all lovers of impartial justice ; but Presbytery often confounds them. When the “ case concerns the exercise of church-power, whether it “ be a remonstrance from a church-member against the deed “ of a court, or an appeal to one superior, from an inferior ; “ whether it be a complaint of an inferior court to a superior, against such as may have refused due submission to “ its authority ; still it is a case between church-officers and “ church-members ; and all the judges are of the former “ class. If they decide against the court, they are in “ danger of acting in a way unfriendly to church-power “ even in their own hands, and of encouraging a spirit of “ anarchy among the people. These views may have often “ a greater influence, than the merits of the cause, in framing the decision. We may thus see why a remonstrant, “ or appellant, often loses his cause in a superior court ; and

“ why the complaint of an inferior court is so often redressed, and its sentence affirmed.”

But to this it is answered, that if *members* are permitted to sit as judges in the case of *members*, there seems to be as much reason to fear that they may be disposed to favour their brethren, as that *church-officers* will be disposed to favour *church-officers*. Of consequence, it will follow, upon this mode of reasoning, that when a member has erred, it ought to be officers alone, in opposition to a favourite first principle of Independency, who should be allowed to judge him ; and when a church-officer errs, it should be members alone, who have no office in the church, and who, even upon the system of these gentlemen, have a right only to *acquiesce* in the proposals of elders, that should be permitted to determine. Or if it be alleged, that the court may be composed partly of those who are members and partly of church-officers, it is replied, that the proportion of those who are judges in Independent courts and are only members, is unfair and dangerous to the rights at least of those who are elders. In many congregations, the number of the former is fifty or sixty times as great as that of the latter ; and in most congregations, they are at least ten or twenty times superior in number. Is it not manifest then, that if this objection be valid when urged against Presbytery, it is much more formidable when applied to Independency, where justice in no case, according to it, can be expected to be shewn to those who are office-bearers, and where partiality in every case, from the vast preponderancy of members who are judges, may be dreaded towards members ? Among Presbyterians, on the contrary, such iniquity, as far as the constitution is concerned, is totally impracticable. While the clergy form a distinguishing part of their courts, an *equal number* of laymen are admitted into them, without whose consent no decision can be passed, and who, representing at large the whole members in their congregations, are ever ready, as the guardians of their rights, to repel any attack which may be made upon their privileges. Thus, according to this candid and equitable plan, it is impossible for the clergy to domineer over the laity, or for the laity, forgetting their proper situation, to be guilty of a lawless and presumptuous invasion of the rights of the clergy, but distinguished alike by equality of numbers and equality of power, they serve mutually to check and restrain, and are prevented from attempt-

ing to tyrannise over each other : while upon the Independent plan, if this objection be conclusive, the members of the church, who constitute the greatest part of their courts, are no less disqualified from administering justice impartially to members, than, in another view, from judging in the cause of those who are church-officers.

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 LETTER XV.

SIR,

SATISFACTORY as may be the general arguments furnished either by reason or by scripture in support of any position, you will not deny that they must be still more convincing, when strengthened by the authority of apostolic example. That this additional evidence in favour of ecclesiastical courts of review can be produced, it shall now be my object to establish.

That courts of review existed among the Jews in the days of Christ, is a fact which few will controvert. Not only were particular rulers appointed over synagogues, but, as was formerly shewn, a general council of scribes or doctors sat at Jerusalem, and decided in cases of appeal from the inferior courts. Whether this was originally a divine institution, or only an appointment of men, as expedient and useful, it seems to have obtained the approbation of our Saviour. Though he reprobated those human inventions which were contrary to the precept or spirit of the law, he never censured this court ; nay, instead of enjoining Nicodemus and Joseph to resign their places in it, he commanded his disciples to obey its decisions, and acknowledge its authority, as far as they were consistent with the word of God. “ Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, (Matth. “ xxiii. 1, 2, 3), saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit “ in Moses’ seat : all *therefore* whatsoever they bid you ob- “ serve, that observe and do ; but do not ye after their “ works ; for they say, and do not.” But how could he have thus spoken, if such a court had appeared to him improper ? Had such an institution been calculated to be productive of as much evil in the ancient church, as it is affirm-

ed by Independents that a similar court in the gospel-church must necessarily occasion, would he ever have required the Israelites at large, as well as his followers, to have acknowledged its authority? This argument acquires additional force, if we suppose that this court was not expressly appointed by the divine commandment, but was only similar to that of the elders in the wilderness, which, according to some, had for a long time been discontinued. If such a court, though not divinely commanded, but founded simply on the general principle of utility, was approved of by our Saviour in the ancient church, must not corresponding courts in the Christian church be *equally worthy* of our approbation and submission for the very same reasons, even though it could not be established that such courts were explicitly enjoined by scripture\*?

But it is not merely among the ancient Jews that this court existed with the divine approbation; in many of the cities where Christianity was preached in the primitive ages, a similar institution appears to have obtained. In these cities there was not only a number of particular congregations which had each their separate and respective office-bearers, but they were placed under the superintendence of a general court, to which, as well as to its own pastors and elders, each of them individually was considered as subject.

That such a court existed in Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome, might easily be proved by an induction of particulars. At present we shall consider only whether it was established in the church at Jerusalem, which may justly be regarded as the parent-society of all Christian churches, and its government as the fairest model of theirs.

Now, that in this church there were not only ministers, as Presbyterians would say, who superintended the affairs of particular congregations, but a Presbytery, consisting of the office-bearers of all the congregations in Jerusalem, which

\* That our Saviour, in this passage, admits both the propriety and the authority of this Jewish court, is evident from this, that the scribes and Pharisees, who composed the Sanhedrin, had a power of authoritative review and controul over the teachers and governors of every particular synagogue, and consequently we cannot suppose that he would have required the Jews to submit to the latter without acknowledging the former. This, indeed, was impossible, for every scribe and Pharisee was subject, both in doctrine and discipline, to this superintending judicatory.

watched over the interests and concerns of the whole, we hope will appear, if it be proved in the 1st place, That there was a greater number of believers in that city than could possibly meet for the purposes of worship in one place; and 2dly, That the elders of these different congregations are represented as associated in one general court, for regulating what related to their common benefit, as well as deciding in cases of appeal or complaint.

It will appear, if it be proved in the 1st place, That there was a greater number of Christians in that city than could possibly meet for the purposes of worship in any one place.

*The account which is delivered in the Acts of the Apostles of the success of the gospel, and of the number of followers which obtained in Jerusalem, favours this idea.*

We have little positive information with regard to the real number of converts to the gospel during the personal ministry of the Saviour. If we attend, however, to the number of ministers who were engaged along with him in preaching the word, and the expressions employed to intimate his success, it will be found to have been considerable. Twelve apostles and seventy disciples laboured together with him in disseminating the gospel; and such was their progress in this blessed work, that not only did their adversaries remark, (John xii 19), that "*the world* had gone after them," but it is declared, (John iv. 1), that they heard that Jesus *made* and "*baptized* more disciples than John"—of whom it is said, (Mark i. 5), "that there went out unto him *all* the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were *all* baptized of him\*." Whatever was their number, we know that

\* It is granted indeed, that the number of converts at this period was small, compared at least with those who should afterwards believe in consequence of his ascension, because, as Jesus tells us, (John vii. 39), "the Spirit was not yet given," *i. e.* so abundantly, "because Jesus was not yet glorified." And it was small too, contrasted with what might naturally have been expected from the personal ministration of so illustrious a character as Jehovah incarnate. Hence we find the Redeemer complaining, in the strong language of metaphor, by the prophet Isaiah, (chap. xlix. 4.), "because he seemed to have laboured in vain, and to have spent his strength for nought, and in vain;" and his servants asking, (chap. liii. 1), "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Compare John xii. 37, 38. It is plain, however, from the context in the first of these places, and from the quotation and application of the last of them in Rom;



they included at least more than five hundred, for we are told by Paul, (1 Cor. xv. 6), that Jesus was seen after his resurrection by more than five hundred brethren at once; and it is probable from what has been said, that many more had attached themselves to the profession of Christianity\*. To that proportion of them which dwelt at Jerusalem, a great addition was made on the day of Pentecost, for, “on the same day,” says Luke, (Acts ii. 41), “there were joined to the church about *three thousand souls*.” Nor were these *three thousand souls*, Jews who had come up to the city of Jerusalem merely to wait upon the feast, and who immediately returned to their native countries, as Independents have asserted. As is remarked by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, p. 38. “The Jews that dwelt without the land of Canaan were not bound to appearance at the festivals there. Nor, secondly, was it possible that they should do so, if they had been commanded, unless they did nothing almost the whole year but go up to Jerusalem, and home again, their habitation being some of them so many months journey distant. Thirdly, What had the dispersed Jews to do at the feast of Harvest (for so it is called, Exod. xxiii. 16), when their harvest, in very many of those places where they dwelt, was not yet begun? And fourthly, If their distance from Jerusalem made them to choose to come up but to some one of the feasts, and omit the rest, why to Pentecost, which was the least solemn of the three, rather than to the Passover or Tabernacles, these two being solemnities for a whole week, Pentecost but for *a day*.” Wherefore they observe, Fifthly, We produce a more probable reason of this matchless and unparalleled concourse at this time, for so

x. 16, that they refer not only to Christ’s personal ministry, but to the whole of the space after his ascension till the gospel was preached very generally to the Gentiles; and therefore must be understood, like all strongly figurative prophetic language, in a restricted sense, since it appears from the New Testament, that many thousands and ten thousands of Jews, during that period, were converted to the faith.

\* When the seventy also, it might have been mentioned, returned from their mission, they reported to Jesus, that they saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven, which certainly imports that very great success had attended their labours, and that a very great number of converts had believed in the Saviour.

“ we doubt not to call it, viz. that the Jews had learned by  
 “ the scripture, and especially out of the Prophesie of  
 “ *Daniel*, that this was the time when the kingdom of  
 “ heaven should appear, as it is apparent both out of Luke,  
 “ chap. xix. ver. 11, and out of the Jews own authors, and  
 “ therefore came in those multitudes to Jerusalem, and there  
 “ settled to dwell, to see the fulfilling of those things that  
 “ all the nations so much looked after.”

Besides, we are told in Acts ii. 5, that these Jews, who are said in the 41st verse to have been added to the church, had dwelt for a considerable time at Jerusalem, and were then residing there. Such, according to the authority of Mintert, is the term κατοικεω, there employed in the original to signify their residence; “ for it properly denotes, in the  
 “ Greek writers, a certain *fixed* and *durable dwelling*, and  
 “ is opposed to παροικεω, which signifies to sojourn or dwell  
 “ in a place for a time only.” And Suicer, on the word, observes, that “ παροικεω properly signifies to be a stranger  
 “ or sojourner in a place, and that, in the ancient glosses,  
 “ κατοικεω, the word employed in Acts, means to dwell or  
 “ reside stately: Quod apud veteres glossas, *habito, incolo*.” The same distinction is preserved in innumerable instances in the Septuagint, and very generally in the New Testament. The former term, for example, is used in Gen. xii. 10. Luke xxiv. 18, &c. to signify a sojourner: and the latter, in Gen. xlii. 34, to express the residence of the Israelites in Egypt, which was for *several hundred years*; in Numb. xiii. 28, 29, to denote the residence of the Amalekites and Canaanites in their respective countries before they were attacked by the Israelites, which comprehended *a still greater portion of time*; the residence of the saints at Lydda, to whom Peter came, (Acts ix. 32), which was stated and permanent; and of Joseph in Nazareth, (Matth. ii. 23), where, according to Eusebius and Epiphanius, he was at least about four years. The only places, in short, where κατοικεω signifies to dwell for a shorter period, are in the Septuagint version of 1 Kings xvii. 20, where, however, it denotes a residence for not less than *a year*; and of Jer. xlii. 15, where it is used to express the residence of the Jewish captains under Johanan, in the land of Egypt, till the danger which they apprehended should be over, but in which place it means a residence in that country which might have been

expected to be protracted for a very considerable space\*. But, in opposition to this, there is a countless multitude of instances in the Septuagint, where κατοικεω, the word which is here used by Luke, can signify neither a residence for a few days only, as Independents suppose to have been the case with these proselytes at the feast of Pentecost, nor even for a year, as when it is applied to Elijah, but for a much longer period†. Nor will it suffice to disprove this to tell us, that some of them are represented by Peter, (Acts ii. 9,) as dwelling in Mesopotamia and other places which are there mentioned, and consequently they could not be statedly residing at Jerusalem. This only describes the places where they had dwelt before they came to Jerusalem, and from which, of course, they received their appellation; but it will not demonstrate, in opposition to the 5th verse, and the most general acceptation of the verb κατοικεω, that they were not statedly dwelling, at that period, in that city. Nor can it be proved that they were merely sojourning in Jerusalem, because they are said in the 5th verse, only to be dwelling in Jerusalem, εν Ιερουσαλημ, and in ver. 9, agreeably to the original, to inhabit Mesopotamia and these other countries, κατοικεν Μισοποταμιαν, &c. for as Independents would not allow, when we hear of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, (Acts xvi. 4), that it means only that they had a temporary residence in Jerusalem, on what principle can they attach this meaning to that expression in the present passage? We see, moreover, that all of these strangers who are mentioned by Luke, in the second chapter of the Acts, are represented by Peter, (ver. 23, 24), not only as contributing to the death, but as witnessing the miracles of the blessed Saviour, which they could not have done, had they

\* Since writing the above, I find that it is employed also in the Septuagint version of Lev. xxiii. 42, where the Lord commands the Israelites, that every year, at the feast of Tabernacles, "they should dwell in booths seven days." But it is evident, that though it is here used to denote their dwelling in booths, though but for seven days, it is in allusion to the residence of their fathers in them for forty years, of which this was the emblem. See ver. 43.

† See, out of the many instances which might be adduced, the following examples: Gen. xi. 2, 31. xiii. 6, 7, 12, 18, xiv. 7, 12. xix. 25, 29, 30. xx. 15. xxi. 20, 21. xxii. 19. xxiv. 62. xxv. 11, xxvi. 6. xxxiv. 10, 22, 23. Exod. ii. 15. Numb. xiii. 19, 28, 29. Deut. i. 4, 44. ii. 4. xix. 1. xxix. 16. Joshua i. 14. Judges x. 1. 2 Sam. ii. 3.

not for a considerable time been dwelling at Jerusalem. *Wherever* they had formerly dwelt, it would appear that henceforth they made choice of Jerusalem as their future habitation ; for we are told in ver. 44, 45, 46, that “ all “ who believed were *together*, and had all things in common : “ and sold their possessions (whether in distant countries or “ at Jerusalem), and parted them to all men, as every man “ had need : and *they* continuing daily with one accord in “ the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did “ eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.” Surely when their possessions in distant countries were sold, we may well suppose that they would reside at Jerusalem, to enjoy the benefit of the ministrations of the apostles. And indeed it seems impossible to explain the expressions which are here employed to denote their fellowship with the church at Jerusalem, without admitting the truth of this idea. Here then are at least above *three thousand* Jews who were members of this church ; and if we consider what is said of the success of Christ’s ministry, and the concourse of his disciples, which in all probability would take place to Jerusalem from other quarters, as soon as they heard of the preaching of the apostles, it is likely that they amounted to a much greater number\*.

Glorious however as were these first triumphs of the gospel in the city of Jerusalem, they were followed by others no less distinguished. “ The Lord,” we are told, Acts ii. 47, after this first great conversion, “ added *daily* to the “ church such as should be saved.” And in chap. iv. 4, that, after a sermon from Peter, “ many of them who heard “ the word believed ; and the number of the men was about “ *five thousand*.” Here the sacred historian does not record merely, as Independents insinuate, the number of them who *heard*, but of them who *believed* in consequence of this discourse, for he is contrasting the happy effects which attended the apostles’ preaching, with the violence and cruelties which were exercised towards them : “ Howbeit, many who “ heard the word *believed* : and the number of the men “ was about five thousand.” It would evidently have been no compensation for the sufferings of the apostles to tell us, that five thousand persons *heard* their sermons, though it

\* The church at Jerusalem was, for a considerable time, the only Christian society which existed in the world.

must have been very consolatory to know that *five thousand* believed.

Besides, as the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost, did not include the hundred and twenty mentioned in the first chapter of the book of the Acts, so the five thousand who are here spoken of, do not comprehend the three thousand who are before mentioned. In *every other passage* of the book of the Acts where Luke describes the number of those who were converted, either upon hearing a sermon or beholding a miracle, he mentions solely those *new believers* who were added to the church, and does not state the number of the whole; and consequently it is extremely improbable indeed, that he should depart from this peculiarity in the present passage. Accordingly we find that Chrysostom, Irenæus, Jerome, Augustine, with many others of the ancient fathers, so understood the passage. In short, as the Jews were accustomed in their calculations to enumerate only the males, and as we find the term *ανδρες*, or men, which is here employed, used repeatedly in calculations in the New Testament\* to signify males as distinguished from females, it is probable that it is so to be understood in the verse before us, and that, besides the men, there was a multitude also of *female* converts. Here then are five thousand, who, when added to the number of previous converts, make the whole amount to near *nine thousand* members, besides a considerable proportion of females. And even though it

\* See John vi. 10, where it is said, that Jesus fed five thousand men by a particular miracle: "So the men sat down, in number about five thousand, *ανδρες*." And compare Matth. xiv. 21. From which it appears that the term in John denotes *only males*, for it is said by that evangelist, that the number of those who were fed at this very miracle was *five thousand men*, besides women and children. "Ang," too, says a very accurate scholar, respecting the word here employed, "differs as much in signification from *ανθρωπος*, in Greek, as *vir* does from *homo*, in Latin. To this difference the sacred writers always attend. A remarkable instance of it we have, 1 Tim. ii. 1—9. When speaking of our race in general, Paul says, *I entreat that prayers be made for all men*, *ανθρωπων*—who will have all men to be saved, *ανθρωπους*—the Mediator between God and men, *ανθρωπων*. But when the apostle comes to speak of the duties proper for the different sexes, he says, *I will that men pray every where*, *τους ανδρας*. In like manner, that women, &c. *γυναικας*. In the 8th and following verses of the chapter, he seems to speak of the duties of persons employed in a family-capacity." Robertson on Lay-preaching, p. 20.



were allowed, in opposition to the usual manner of Luke, that he intended to inform us, not of the number who were converted upon this particular occasion, but of the number of the members of the church in general, it is plain that they comprehended *five thousand males*, besides several thousand of believing females\*.

But great as was the number of disciples at Jerusalem, at the period referred to, it did not rest here. While the people magnified the apostles for the extraordinary miracle performed at the death of Ananias and Sapphira, it is said, Acts v. 14, "that believers were *the more* added to the Lord, *multitudes* both of men and women,  $\pi\lambda\eta\theta\eta$ ." And again, we are told, Acts vi. 7, that "the word of God *increased*; and the number of the disciples *multiplied* in Jerusalem *greatly*; and a *great company* of the priests were obedient to the faith." And indeed if a *great company of the priests*, the chief opponents of Christianity, and men whose example was so much followed by the people, became obedient to the faith, we may well suppose that the additions which at this period were made to the church must have been uncommonly great. Here then we have a collection of at least *ten or twelve thousand* Christians in the city of Jerusalem, who were all not only hearers but members of the church, and probably they consisted of a much greater number. Nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider the abundant communication of the Spirit, which at that time attended the ministration of the gospel; the wide diffusion of the word of truth, for the apostles are represented by their enemies, (Acts v. 28), as even "*filling* Jerusalem with their doctrine;" and the vast number of inhabitants contained in that city, for it is evident, from the account delivered by Josephus of its desolation, that it must have been one of the most populous cities in the world†.

Is it said however, as has frequently been done by Independents, that whatever was the number of the members at

\* If we may judge of the number of female converts at that period from what it has been at every other time with which we are acquainted, we may safely conclude that it must have exceeded at least that of the males.

† If many flocked into Jerusalem before the siege of it by Vespasian, we know also, from the testimony of history, that many thousands of Christians, as well as others, left it, and made way for them.

Jerusalem, at the period which we have specified, they were completely dispersed at the persecution which took place upon the death of Stephen? It is answered, that such an inference seems by no means deducible from the language of Luke, in recording the effects of the persecution which ensued on the death of that martyr; and in support of this assertion, the following particulars are mentioned from the chapter where this persecution is related.

In the 1st place, as is observed by a judicious writer already quoted\*, “There is no evidence whatever, that this persecution was protracted beyond the day of Stephen’s martyrdom. The words of the historian,” Acts viii. 1. *καὶ ἐγένηκεν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ*, which are translated in our version *at that time*, “literally mean on that day, or, more emphatically, on the same day. Besides, though the term *day* is sometimes used for an indefinite time in prophetic language, yet never in a plain historical narration. Luke is always accurate in the use of his terms; and, when about to mention a period of time more indefinitely, says either *in those days*, Acts i. 15, or *about that time*, Acts xii. 1. It may be supposed, indeed, that for a few days, the Jewish council were employed in trying the persons imprisoned, and that they inflicted upon them the only punishment which, without the consent of the Roman governor, it was competent for them, that of beating in the synagogue. It is probable however, that they durst not farther patronise any open persecution in the city; nor do they seem at all to have carried it to the neighbourhood. When Saul, notwithstanding the death of Stephen and the punishment of others, still breathed out threatening and death against the disciples of Jesus, he obtained from the chief priests letters to Damascus, which lay beyond the limits of Herod’s jurisdiction.”

It is plain also in the 2d place, as was before stated, That the *all* who are said, (Acts viii. 1), to have been scattered abroad except the apostles, were the ministers, and not the members of that Christian church; for we see that a church, consisting of members, remained in Jerusalem, (ver. 3), after those who are mentioned in the 1st verse are represented as having been *all* scattered abroad except the apostles, and

\* Mr. Robertson, p. 37.

who consequently could only be the other ministers of the church.

And 3dly, as is noticed by Mr. Robertson in his Remarks, p. 41, and briefly hinted by Henry in his Commentary, The word *δισπαρησαν*, which is rendered by our translators, (ver. 1), "*were scattered abroad*," does not properly mean that they dispersed in consequence of very violent persecution. "These preachers of the gospel," says the first of these writers, p. 41, "did not leave Jerusalem; so much on account of the violence of the persecution, as in obedience to the command of Christ, *When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another* : Matth. x. 23. Certain it is that *διασπειρω* does not so properly signify *to disperse by violence*, as another verb, *διασκορπιζω*, which we find employed, Matth. xxvi. 31, and Acts v. 37. The former word implies no more than *to separate*, by whatever means that is effected. After the confusion of tongues, God is said to have *scattered* men on the face of the earth, *διασπειρεν*, when, in the course of his providence, he led them to settle at a distance from one another. Many Jews were said, in the time of our Saviour, to be scattered among other nations, *διασπορα*, though their exile was *voluntary*. It may be further observed, that in all languages a verb in a passive form may sometimes have a neuter, or, as the Greeks say, a middle signification. Such is the case with the very verb in question, as used in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament\*. When Pharaoh had denied straw to the Israelites, it is said, *they were scattered abroad*, *λαος δισπαρη*; that is, they, of *their own accord*, went in every direction in quest of stubble. When, therefore, the church at Jerusalem is said to be scattered abroad, the meaning seems to be, that viewing the persecution raised against them as a signal to depart, they, either of their own accord, or in concert with the apostles, left the city, and distributed themselves in every direction. It is said to have been *along* (*κατα*) the regions of Judea and Samaria. Thus they either chose their directions, or had them pointed out to them. Luke continues their history in a following verse : They then who had *dispersed themselves*, went through the land preaching the word."

\* See 1 Sam. xiv. 34. 2 Sam. xx. 21, &c.

Viewing this passage then as a whole, the following appears to have been the real extent of that persecution, which has so frequently been represented by Independents as completely dispersing that Christian church.

“ On the same day in which Stephen was killed\*, many, relying on the protection of the Jewish rulers, or acting under their authority, began to offer outrage to the ministers of the gospel, who were preaching the word. The fury of the former was so great, though not said to terminate in blood, that all the latter either left the city, or so entirely disappeared as to justify the historian in saying, They were *all* scattered abroad. In the mean time, which shews the persecution was not general, devout men, without molestation, carried Stephen to his burial, and made a great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he carried the persecution farther than his companions, for entering into the houses of private families, which were probably the receptacles of those who preached the doctrine of Christ, he dragged both men and women to prison†. This would cause any few ministers who might have conceal'd themselves, also to leave the city. As Christians would make no resistance to their persecutors, so all might pass without exciting such confusion as to draw the attention of the Roman governor. It farther appears, that the hottest persecution was carried on by Saul: *He made havock of the church.* But wherein did that consist? Not in shedding streams of blood. To that length, supported as he was by the Jewish council, he durst not proceed: But entering into some of the houses of the Christians, he committed a few men and women to prison. That either the Jews should have purposed to imprison the great body of Christian converts, or that all these should have left the city for the imprisonment of a few, are ideas too absurd to need any answer.”

But if such only was the amount of the persecution which is here related, it is plain that the members whom it took from that church (if it removed from it any) could not be

\* See Robertson's Remarks, p. 36.

† *Κατα τους οίκους*, which is rendered by our translators, (Acts viii. 3), “into every house,” as properly signifies “into the houses.” This persecution, moreover, might be styled a great persecution, which, for a time, deprived the saints at Jerusalem of so many faithful pastors.”

considerable: and the loss which was sustained, we have reason to believe, was speedily compensated, and more than compensated, by the numerous converts that were added in their stead. We are told, that after the persecution raised by Herod, in which only one person was put to death, "the word of God grew and multiplied:" Acts xii. 24. And such was its success, that we are informed by James, (Acts xxi. 20), that it numbered among its followers at Jerusalem "many myriads, or *ten thousands* of Jews\*." This expression, indeed, Mr. Ewing, together with the ancient Independents, asserts "to be indefinite." "We rejoice," also, adds he, p. 31, "in admitting that it signifies very many. But the passage does not necessarily imply, that James and the elders were speaking of the numbers of believers in the city of Jerusalem, but rather of the numbers of believers of the Jewish nation†." Here it may be observed, that though we should grant that *μυριας* is sometimes understood by the sacred writers in an indefinite sense, so as to signify a number less than *ten thousand*, yet it does not hold with regard to *μυριας*, the word here employed. The latter, in Acts xix. 19, Luke xii. 1. Heb. xii. 22. Jude 14, and Rev. v. 11, which are all the places where it occurs in the New Testament, cannot mean less than the literal number, and in some of them evidently, if taken indefinitely, must signify more‡. Besides, according

\* The words in the original are very strong: "Thou seest, brother," said James to Paul, "*how many ten thousands* of Jews there are which believe, *ποσαι μυριαδες*."

† It is somewhat remarkable, that while this gentleman professes his joy at the great number of Jews who believed in Jerusalem, he attempts to make it as small as possible. And it is very extraordinary, that while Independents endeavour to prove, against infidels, the divinity of Christianity from its astonishing success in the early ages, they should virtually strengthen the hands of these infidels, by endeavouring to shew that in a city which, for almost thirty years, had witnessed more of the miracles, and enjoyed more of the ablest preaching of the gospel, than any other place, no more converts were found among those who were its inhabitant than could easily assemble for worship, or government, in a *single congregation*!!!

‡ In the first of these passages, the sum at which the books of the Ephesians were valued, is said to be *πεντε μυριαδες αργυριου*, which is literally "five myriads," or, according to our translators, "fifty thousand pieces of silver," where evidently the expression cannot be understood as signifying less than ten thousands. In the second



to the interpretation of this very gentleman, it is obvious that it cannot signify less than *many ten thousands* in the passage in question, for it includes, according to him, not merely the number of believers in the city of Jerusalem, but the number of believers from *the whole Jewish nation*. Certainly, considering the time during which the gospel had been preached, and the success which it had obtained in many countries before the period which is here mentioned, *many ten thousands* of Jews must have been comprehended among its followers. But allowing that the word *μυριαδες* here properly means, that there were many *ten thousands* of Jews at this time in that city, "they are not affirmed," says Mr. Ewing, p. 32, "to be all members of the church at Jerusalem; and very many of them were most likely believing-Jews, assembled from various quarters at Jerusalem, at the day of Pentecost. For the probability of this supposition we may appeal to the haste made by Paul, if possible, to be at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and to the increasing number of fellow-travellers who joined company with him on the road, as appears from chap. xx. 16, and xxi. 16." On this however it may be remarked, that no argument can be adduced from *the number* of those who went up with Paul at this time to Jerusalem, to shew that they were travelling thither to observe this solemnity. It is not said, in the last of these texts, that those whom he met going up to Jerusalem were going thither with *that design*, or that *their number* was such as one would naturally expect, had there been a general convocation to the feast of Pentecost. All that is mentioned is simply this,

of them, believers are said, in the original, to come to an assembly "of myriads of angels," *και μυριασιν αγγελων*; and in the third, it is declared that when the Lord comes to judgment, he will be attended "by myriads of his saints," or rather "holy ones," *μυριασιν αγιας*. And in both of these places, it is no less obvious that it cannot signify less than *ten thousands* of these spirits; and if it be supposed to be taken in an *indefinite* acceptation, it must denote even more. Compare similar expressions in a description, at least emblematic, of the universal judgment: Dan. vii. 9, 10. And in the last of these passages, considering the representation which is there given of the numbers who crowded to witness the miracles of Jesus, it seems to be equally manifest that it cannot mean less than its strict signification, for we may well suppose that more than one myriad of spectators would be collected, and that they might even amount to twenty or thirty thousand. See also Rev. v. 11.

“ That there went up with Paul and Luke from Cesarea, “ also *certain* of the disciples of Cesarea, and with them one “ Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple.” Had there been a general assemblage to this sacred festival, would not the number of Jews, who went from Cesarea, have been represented as much greater? It has been questioned moreover, and upon very good grounds, as is observed by the venerable Westminster Assembly, whether Paul arrived at Jerusalem before the day of Pentecost: And even admitting that he was present, it by no means appears that by the many ten thousands of believing Jews of whom James speaks, are intended the whole number of believing Jews, as Mr. Ewing asserts, who had come up to this feast from the various quarters of the Gentile world. It was before evinced, that the Jews in general, who lived among the Gentiles, were neither bound nor accustomed to resort to Jerusalem from every part in the earth to observe this solemnity, which lasted for a single day only, and which could not with propriety be kept by many of them, as their harvest at this period was not yet begun. The number then of such Jews, from other countries, must have been comparatively small. In fine, whatever number of these Jews might have been present at the feast, they do not seem to be included among the myriads of Jews who were pointed out to Paul by the apostle James. The latter are *all* represented as strangers to Paul, and as being *informed* simply by the testimony of others, (ver. 21), “ that he taught *all the Jews which were among the Gentiles* to forsake Moses”—on account of which it is declared that they were offended. As there were few places however in the Gentile world where Paul had not either before this preached, or sent others to preach under his direction, it is obvious that those myriads who were displeased with these unjust representations of his doctrine, and had heard of it merely by the testimony of others, must have been Jews chiefly, distinct from those who dwelt among the Gentiles. But if even in the little country of Judea there were *many myriads* of believing Jews, the greatest proportion of these must undoubtedly have been in Jerusalem, which had hitherto been the habitation of almost all the apostles, and where, as we already saw, more than twenty years before, the converts amounted to nine or ten thousand. Allowing however that only *three* of these myriads belonged to Jerusalem, it will make the number of Jews who were

connected with that church, independently of converts who would be added to them from the Gentiles, no less than *thirty thousand*. And considering, as will be noticed under a following argument, the number of ministers, who for so long a space had laboured amongst them, it is probable that their proportion of these *many* ten thousands must have been considerably greater.

But if such was the number of members at Jerusalem, it is evident that they must have been divided into different congregations, each superintended by its respective pastors. No place could be found sufficiently large to contain such a multitude, with the rest of the hearers who would assemble along with them; no preacher could be heard by such an audience; and it cannot be conceived that so great a number could receive together, in the very same place, the sacrament of the supper. Eusebius informs us, in his Ecclesiastical History, book viii. chap. i. that the houses in which the Christians at first met were very small, and that it was in consequence only of the favour which, in process of time, was manifested to them by the Roman emperors and governors that they were enabled to erect more capacious buildings: “Ὅν δὴ ἐνεκα μηδαμῶς ἐν τοῖς παλαιαῖς οἰκοδομησάτιν ἀρκουμένοι, εὐρείας εἰς πλάτος ἀναπάσας τὰς πόλεις ἐκθεμελίωσαν, ἀνίσταν ἐκκλησίας;” i. e. “The ancient buildings being by no means sufficient to contain the people, they erected in every city larger churches.” Accordingly the houses in which the primitive Christians were accustomed to meet, were *schools*, or *upper rooms*, or *private dwellings*. We hear of their assembling in an upper room, Acts i. 12, &c.; in the house of Mary, Acts xii. 12; in the school of Tyrannus, Acts xix. 9; in an upper chamber at Troas, Acts xx. 8; in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, Rom. xvi. 5; of Nymphas, Col. iv. 15; and of Archippus, Philem. 2. But where could an upper room, or school, or house, be found in Jerusalem which was able to accommodate thirty thousand individuals for all the purposes of religious worship? The only place sufficiently large was the temple; but even in it, there does not appear to have been any single apartment which could conveniently admit such a multitude. The most spacious court in this building was that called Solomon’s Porch. “Now the place,” says Ayton, p. 226, “which went under this name, was not the mere entrance of the east gate to the outer temple; but the whole of

“ the east wall, which was built by Solomon, at an extraordinary expence, and was in length 500 cubits, or 250 yards.—It is further,” adds he, “ to be considered, that the whole length of this wall within, there were walks or cloisters from each side of the entry of the porch to the ends of the wall, that were supported by a treble row of marble pillars, into a double walk, which was in breadth 30 cubits, or 15 yards. The innermost of these pillars was joined to the wall, and this made the two walks to be divided in the middle by a row of pillars. Now, the whole of this breadth, from the wall on which the innermost row of pillars stood, to the Beautiful Gate, together with the length of the said wall, which was 500 cubits, was, according to Dr. Lightfoot, the learned Mr. Selden, (*de Jure Nat. et Gen. lib. iii. cap. vi.*), and Mr. Lewis, (*Orig. Heb. lib. iii. cap. xiii.*), denominated Solomon’s Porch.” But it is obvious that this place could by no means accommodate so many thousands of members, together with their children, and the numerous strangers who would continually be attracted from curiosity to hear them. Besides, how could a single preacher be audible, in a court intersected by so many rows of pillars, to forty thousand hearers? Or how could thirty thousand members meet together in such a place for the purposes of government? Could each of these persons make himself be heard by such an assembly? could he distinctly hear the opinion and vote of every individual? and would not business be conducted with extreme tardiness and difficulty where so many had to state their sentiments and vote\*? But even granting all

\* Is it said, that Ezra, after the captivity, read and expounded the law to the Jews, who amounted to a still greater number, and was heard by them all? *Neh. viii. 1—5.* I ask, whether Independents can suppose that a single individual could be heard by fifty or sixty thousand persons? And is it still affirmed, that this fact, though wonderful, seems to be asserted in this passage? It is replied, that it is not asserted nearly so strongly as is done in *Deut. xxxi. 30*, that Moses “ spake in the ears of *all the congregation* of Israel the words of his song,” at a time when their males only (see *Numb. xxvi. 51, 62*), amounted to six hundred and twenty-four thousand seven hundred and thirty, and when, with their wives and children, they made up probably almost two millions. But if Independents would not maintain that Moses made himself audible at once to such a multitude, how can they demonstrate (since in the nature of things it is as certainly impossible) that Ezra

these suppositions to be not only possible but probable, it must still be proved that the Christians at pleasure enjoyed the temple for these religious purposes. So far however is this fact from being clear, that, though extremely important, it is passed over in silence, a circumstance which probably would not have taken place had they possessed that privilege. Nay, though at first, before the blood of any Christians was shed, the apostles ventured occasionally to preach in the temple, even after they had been beaten for it by the high-priests, we do not find that they afterwards enjoyed such a liberty; and neither at first, nor afterwards, did they dare to dispense in it the sacrament of the supper, or convene, for the deliberations of government, the members who belonged to their church. It is manifest that liberty would not be granted to them for the latter, either by the priests or the people, who would be alarmed at the idea of their meeting alone, in a place so sacred, for purposes unknown to them; and it is no less obvious that they would not attempt to administer in it the former. If Paul so highly displeased even the common people, (Acts xxi), though they favoured and magnified the apostles, that they endeavoured to kill him, for bringing, as they supposed, certain Greeks into the temple, and polluting the holy place, would it not have been much more dangerous had they dared to celebrate in it a *new sacrament*, which vied with, and far surpassed in point of frequency, according to Independents, the most solemn sacrament of the ancient economy\*? Ac-

was heard in an open street by fifty or sixty thousand, merely because he is said to have read the law to them when they were met together? And if Moses, moreover, might be said to speak his song, as we are informed in Deut. xxxi. 30, compared with ver. 28, in the ears of all the congregation of Israel, when he spake only in the ears of their elders and officers, who again were to communicate what he said to the people, might not something like this be done by Ezra? Or might he not only read and explain it to a part, while they explained it to others, especially as we are told, (Neh. viii. 7, 8), that “*thirteen others*” also, besides the Levites, read to “the people, at that time, in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading?”

\* That it is probable that the supper was more frequently dispensed than the sacrament of circumcision is readily conceded, but *how much more* frequently, notwithstanding all that is asserted by Independents, scripture does not appear expressly to say. In 1 Cor. xi. 25, we are told, that as often as Christians drink the sacramental cup, they should do it in remembrance of Christ; and in



cordingly, while the apostles are said to have been imprisoned by the high-priests, because they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead, (Acts iv. 2), we do not hear that they were censured for

ver. 26, that *as often* as they ate that bread, or drank that cup, they shewed forth the Lord's death till he came; but how often they should do so, it does not specify. In Acts ii. 42, it is said, that the converts who believed on the day of Pentecost, "continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer." But all that is here recorded, is merely that they persevered in the belief of the doctrines, and in the observance of all the ordinances of Christianity, while, at the same time, it is evident that there is not the smallest hint *how often* the supper, or any other ordinance, was to be observed. In Acts ii. 46, we are informed, that these Christians, continuing *daily* with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, or, as others render it, in a house, did participate their food, or the food, with gladness and singleness of heart. But neither does this seem to be sufficiently explicit: for in the 1st place, It is not certain that it is the breaking of *sacramental* bread, and not their feasts of love, which is intended. And 2dly, If this passage prove any thing upon the subject, it proves too much. It will shew that we should eat the supper, not merely, as Independents maintain, every Sabbath, but *daily*. In Acts xx. 6, 7, it is said, that when Paul and his companions had tarried seven days at Troas, on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them. But it is not here declared, that on *every first day of the week*, when the disciples came together, they ate sacramental bread, but only that on *that particular first day* of the week they had done so. If some ministers, from a distance, arriving in Edinburgh on the Monday before the sacrament of the Supper was dispensed, should remain till the first day of the following week, and then assist at the dispensation of the sacrament, would that circumstance, if narrated by any historian, prove that the Supper was observed every Sabbath in all the churches of Edinburgh? Or if Independents refer to the writings of the fathers in support of this practice, it may be observed, 1st, That many improprieties, as was before shewn, were admitted even by the primitive church; and that we must try this, as well as all their practices, by the scriptures, and see whether it is enjoined or warranted by them. Upon examining the scriptures however, we perceive that it is not explicitly announced how often this ordinance should be observed in the church; and consequently, though many of the primitive churches ate the Supper every Sabbath, we no more offend against the word of God than they, if we do not ate it every first day of the week. And 2dly, This argument proves too much. Cyprian, A. D. 250, informs us, in his 'Treatise on the Lord's Prayer, that *daily communions* were the common practice at that time; and Fortunatus, who lived at the same period, adduces the fourth petition of that prayer as an argument

meeting the Christians by themselves in the temple, for the affairs of government, or for dispensing, in that place, the sacrament of the supper. And it is remarkable, that at the very time that it is said that the first Christians continued in the temple to receive instruction, it is added, (Acts ii. 46), "that they brake bread from house to house," or in different houses; *i. e.* as many interpreters explain it, and as the Syriac translates it, they kept the eucharist, or brake sacramental bread\*. But if no single person could be audible, as an instructor, to thirty or forty thousand hearers at once; if they could not meet together with ease and satisfaction for the purposes of government; if no single place could be found to accommodate such a multitude, when, as at that early period, according to Eusebius, the houses for worship were extremely small; if even in the temple there was no apartment which could contain such a number; and, whatever its size, if it could not be obtained by them, when they chose to resort to it, for the private meetings of their members for government, or even for the public celebration of the supper; is it not undeniable that there must have been a variety of congregations in the city of Jerusalem, furnished with distinct and separate pastors, and meeting in separate and appropriate churches.

for communicating *every day*. Basil, in the fourth century, recommends *daily communion*; and says, that it was the practice of the church of Cesarea where he was, to celebrate the sacrament *four times a-week, viz.* on Sabbath, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, (Basil. Epist. 289.)—Ambrose seems to intimate that *daily communions* were in use at Milan, (De Sacram. lib. v. cap. iv. p. 449.)—Jerome tells us, that they were kept up, in his time, in the churches of Spain, and at Rome, (Epist. lii. ad Lucin.)—And Augustine, about the year 410, (Epist. cxviii. ad Januar.), that the eucharist was received by *some daily*. If Independents then, when scripture is silent, wish us to take the example of the primitive church as our guide, and from this contend that we should eat the Supper every Sabbath, why do not they themselves adopt this example in its full extent, and communicate *daily*, or at least on Sabbath, and Wednesday, and Friday, and Saturday? By these observations it is not intended however to say, whether weekly communion is lawful or unlawful, but only to shew, that as scripture is silent as to the precise degree of frequency, they are not entitled to declaim with that severity which they often discover against others who cannot, so often as they, observe that ordinance.

\* On this circumstance however, as was before stated, no stress is laid, as it is not certain that it is the breaking of sacramental bread which is here intended.

## LETTER XVI.

SIR,

THAT there must have been a plurality of congregations in the city of Jerusalem, I have endeavoured to shew in the preceding Letter, from the number of believers who resided in that city. This rendered it totally impossible for them all to convene in a single place for any of the purposes of religious fellowship. And this, as was remarked, was naturally to be expected, for Jesus having ascended to the right hand of his Father, and shed down his Spirit in more rich abundance on the souls of men than had ever formerly been witnessed by the world, the delightful period had now arrived, when his spiritual offspring were to be more in number than the drops of dew, “from the womb of the morning :” Psal. cx. 3.

The same conclusion may be argued from *the number of ministers, who, for a very considerable time, were continually employed in labouring in that city.* Among these were the twelve apostles, and, as most expositors apprehend, the seventy disciples, together with many prophets, (Acts xi. 27, 28), and many elders, (ver. 30.) The first class of these ministers moreover, and consequently we must suppose the rest of them, were so engaged in preaching, that they were obliged to institute an order of ministers to serve tables, that they might themselves be enabled, along with their fellow-ministers, to give themselves *continually* to prayer and the *ministry of the word*: Acts vi. But if there was only one congregation of believers where each of these teachers ministered in his turn, how extremely unaccountable must this representation appear? But *one* congregation, and above *a hundred* ministers, so *unceasingly* employed in preaching the word, that they could not find leisure to distribute among the poor the money which had been collected for them! It may be said indeed, that while one of them preached to this congregation, the rest were itinerating through different parts of the city. But still it appears very extraordinary, that while only two or three were necessary for the instruction of this particular congregation, so many teachers remained in Jerusalem even for the purpose of iti-

nerating, while they were much more needed in many other places, as well as the surrounding country. Can it be believed, if there had been only one congregation in that city, that so many ministers would have resided in it stately for almost *thirty* years, while the rest of the world was so destitute of the means of religious instruction\*? Such a supposition seems by no means to be probable. The only way then in which we can account for this fact appears to be this, that there was such a number of congregations in Jerusalem as furnished sufficient employment for all of them.

In the third place, The *diversity of languages* spoken by these Christians at Jerusalem, clearly evinces that there must have been a corresponding diversity of congregations in that city.

We are told, Acts ii, that among those who were converted on the day of Pentecost, and who heard the apostles speak, each *in their own language*, were devout men from Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Prygia, Pamphylia, and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and also from Rome, Crete, and Arabia. We are informed also, Acts vi, of a murmuring against the Hebrews, or Jews who spake the Syriac tongue, by the Grecians, or Jews who, having come from places where the Greek language prevailed, spake that language. Now admitting even that some of these might not remain at Jerusalem, this diversity of languages would still exist among those who continued, and rendered it equally necessary, as on the day of Pentecost, that the gospel should be preached to them by various ministers, and in different congregations, in their native tongues. It may be said indeed, that they might understand the Syriac, as the Jews at present, though they might use the vernacular tongues of the various countries where they are scattered, still have their religious services performed in the Hebrew language. It is an indisputable fact, however, that the Jews are in general ignorant of the Hebrew; and the performance of their religion in that language no more proves that they understand it, than the use of the Latin in the Romish church proves that the common people are acquainted with it. Besides, the exclusive

\* The only instances recorded in scripture of occasional visits to other places by any of these ministers (Barnabas excepted), are extremely few, and appear to have been but temporary.

use of the Septuagint translation by the Jews for near 300 years both before and after Christ, and the writing of the New Testament in Greek (as Lardner shews to have been the case), proves beyond question that the Syriac, at this period, was understood neither by the foreign Jews nor by Gentile proselytes \*. So little indeed was it known, that even Philo translates the most common Syriac word on the authority of others. And it will be obvious to any one who examines with attention the Targums, or Talmuds, that so striking a difference subsists between them, even in point of language, as shews that the Syriac, at that period, could neither have been generally nor uniformly understood by the Jewish nation. Let any one, in short, consider whether it is probable that the native Jews of Rome, and Crete, and Pontus, &c. with the proselytes from these countries, could be so well acquainted with the language of Judea, as to be able to receive in it religious instruction with the same pleasure and advantage as in their original tongues?—Or that the apostles, who were enriched with the gift of tongues for almost thirty years, did not exercise this invaluable endowment, though it was absolutely requisite for disseminating the gospel among strangers and foreigners, or when at least it must have been much more conducive to their edification to have heard the discourses of these ministers of Christ in their native languages than in one which was less familiar?

It is objected, that the various Jews mentioned by Luke (Acts ii), are represented as having understood the apology of Peter on the day of Pentecost, (ver. 14), though he spake to them all in the Syriac tongue. It is answered, that before this observation can have force, it must be demonstrated that Peter spake to all of them *at once in the same language*, and not to each of them in order, in their respective languages, as it is plain was done before this by the

\* It was only after the Targums, or the Translations, and the Talmuds, or the Expositions, of the ancient Scriptures in the Syriac Language had been finished, that the Greek versions of the Seventy, and of Aquila the Jew, ceased to be used by the Jewish nation. And the discontinuance of them was produced only by the decrees of their doctors, who forbade the use of them, lest their countrymen should be led by them to embrace Christianity.



apostles at large, (ver. 5. to 11\*); or, on the other-hand, that he was the only apostle who addressed these Jews at this particular time. Neither of these, we apprehend, can be evinced. Peter alone, indeed, is particularized, but this does not prove that other apostles also did not address them. The same apostle is represented in the following chapter, from ver. 12, as the only person who spake to the Jews on another occasion, and his speech only is related; yet we are told in chap. iv. 1, that John also spake to them. Besides, when Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, the *eleven* are said to have stood up with him; and it appears much more natural to suppose that they rose like him to address the audience, as they had done before, (ver. 6, 7, 8), in their native tongues, than that they were altogether silent. Again, it is observed, (ver. 37), that when the multitude were aroused to a feeling of their guilt by the truths which they heard, they came not only to Peter, but to the rest of the apostles, and asked what they should do? which seems to suggest that they had heard these truths from them as well as from Peter. In fine, after they had cordially embraced the gospel, it is said, that they steadily adhered to the profession of it; and the language in which it is expressed, (ver. 42), is this, That they continued in the doctrine of the apostles, or that which they had heard from them upon this important occasion. But if Peter spake to these companies separately, or if the rest of the apostles, as well as Peter, addressed them by themselves in different divisions, it might be, as on the preceding part of this very day, in their re-

\* In ver. v, we are told, that there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, from *every nation* under heaven; and in ver. 6, that each of these heard the apostles speak in their own languages. Of these languages fifteen are mentioned: and if there were Jews, as is here said, dwelling at Jerusalem, from *every nation* under heaven, it is probable that the languages which were spoken by the apostles on this occasion must have been much more numerous.—But if there were either fifteen or twenty companies of Jews who were all addressed by the apostles in different languages, it must have been at different times, for there were but twelve of these ministers, and it was impossible for any of them to speak to more than one company at once. If the apostles, however, immediately before this apology of Peter, spoke to a part of these companies at one time, and to another at another, might not the same thing also be done by him when he delivered his apology, upon the supposition that, at that time, he alone spake to them in the name of the apostles?

spective languages : and no objection can be urged, from what is said in this place by the sacred historian, against the argument adduced, from the diversity of languages which originally existed among the believers in Jerusalem, for a diversity of congregations in that Christian church.

Whether then we consider the number of members, or the number of ministers, or the diversity of language in the church of Jerusalem, we have abundant evidence that it comprehended different congregations, and that they could not all conveniently assemble for worship in one place.

Mr, Ewing, however, informs us, that neither the number of the disciples at Jerusalem, nor any of these circumstances, prevented them usually from meeting in one place ; and of this he apprehends that he has direct evidence, for “ where their numbers are mentioned, their meeting in one place is also mentioned.” In proof this he refers us to Acts ii. 41—47, where we are told that “ all who believed “ were together, and had all things in common.” But though it were granted that the church *at this time*, when it was comparatively *small*, met in one assembly, it would not follow that it could meet in one place when it was much larger. Besides, all that is mentioned in this passage is, that, from the love which subsisted among these primitive converts, they were frequently together, and cultivated eagerly each other’s society. But to this it was not necessary that they should statedly meet in one great assembly\*. And though we are told moreover, in this and other places, that they assembled in the temple, it cannot be proved from this fact, that they convened in one congregation even to hear the word, for, as was before observed, the temple contained a variety of places, each of which could conveniently accommodate a congregation †.

\* *Ἐπὶ το αὐτο*, which is rendered “ together,” in the present passage, according to Lightfoot, is used by the Seventy to signify an assembly, sometimes in the same body, Judges vi. 33.—sometimes simply in the same state, Jer. vi. 12.—and sometimes engaged merely in the same action, or exercise, though in different places, 2 Sam. ii. 12, Psal. xxxiv. 3, xlix. 2. &c. See also Psal. ii. 2.

† “ The High Church of Glasgow,” says Ayton, p. 220, “ hath “ three distinct congregations in it, and there is as much room “ besides, as might contain one or two more ; but their being in “ that huge building all at one time, will no more denominate them “ one single assembly for public worship, meeting in the same in-

Still, however, Mr. Ewing contends that his assertion is confirmed by Acts v. 12, 13, where it is said, that “by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Poreh : and of the rest durst no man join himself unto them : but the people magnified them.”) But before any argument from this can be conclusive, he must prove that by *the all* who were in Solomon’s Poreh, are intended, not the apostles alone, as distinguished from the people, but the whole body of Christian converts. That it was the apostles alone, is probable from the connection of the passage. The same fear which fell upon the multitude in general, and which for a time kept them at a distance from the apostles, is asserted, in the 11th verse, to have fallen equally upon *the whole church*, and, we may naturally suppose, would produce upon them a similar effect. But *if the rest of the church*, as well as the multitude, durst not for a time join themselves to the apostles, is it not obvious that it must have been the apostles alone who are said to have been *all* in Solomon’s Poreh? Besides, they only are spoken of in the immediately preceding clause, when it is mentioned that many signs and wonders were done by them among the people; and consequently it is most natural to suppose that the *all* who are specified in the very next words, and who are said to have been in Solomon’s Poreh, must have been the very same persons. And that the apostles might go up to Solomon’s Poreh without the people, seems credible, not only from what has been already stated, but from what is recorded, in a foregoing chapter, of Peter and John, who are represented as going up alone to the temple. Nay, though we should allow that the whole of the disciples, as well as the apostles, were in Solomon’s Poreh, yet if we consider, as has been remarked, that it was fitted to accommodate a number of congregations, it must be evident to all, that it does not necessarily follow that they were all collected into one assembly. Glass, and other Independents, have asserted, that no more believers resided in Jerusalem than what stately met in one place, because the apostles are represented, at the election of the deacons, (Acts vi), as calling the multitude, and enjoining them to elect

“dividual place, under the instruction of one pastor, than if they were at some miles distance.”

these officers. But it might be only the heads of them who in reality were summoned, if, as we have attempted to shew, the whole were too numerous to meet in one place. Thus, as we formerly noticed, Moses is often said to have called all Israel, and to have spoken *in the ears* of all the congregation whatsoever the Lord enjoined him, while, as was formerly noticed, he assembled and addressed the elders or office-bearers only. Let it be admitted, however, that the multitude of believers at large were called, it is not said, either that all of the apostles, or all of the disciples were in one place, and from any thing that is here mentioned, they might convene in a number of separate assemblies. Were we to be told, for instance, that the ministers of Glasgow called the multitude of the members, and asked them to elect a General Session, would it not immediately occur to us, from what we know of the congregations in Glasgow, that the members would not all meet in one place, but in their different churches, and with their respective office-bearers?—And suppose it to be demonstrated from *other* passages, as we have already attempted, that the Christians in Jerusalem, like the members in Glasgow, were far too numerous to assemble conveniently in the same place, though this language be used, is it not equally plain that they would meet in different assemblies? Nothing then can be certainly deduced from the passage before us, as to the actual number of congregations in Jerusalem\*.

It is said further, that all the deacons were brought to the apostles, and ordained by them in one place. There is a material difference, however, between election and ordination, and though the latter might be performed in one assembly, the former might be done by the members of the church in their different congregations.

Is it contended once more, that the church at Jerusalem was a single congregation, because the members are represented, (Acts xv), as all assembled at the decision on the reference from the church of Antioch? It is replied, that the whole of the members are not said to have convened with the apostles on that occasion; but all that is mentioned is simply this, that such of the disciples as could attend, and were so disposed, were allowed to be hearers of that interest-

\* “Let Independents but consider,” say the Westminster Divines, “how the city of *London* choose their common-council, and “present them to the court of aldermen;” p. 21.

ing discussion. What this number was, is not specified.—Nay, it might perhaps be alleged with considerable plausibility, that it is not evident, from the sacred history, that any of the private members of the church were present. The term *brethren*, we know, by which it is supposed by Independents that they are here distinguished, is frequently given to ministers as such, and to them alone. It is the name by which the ministers of the church of Ephesus are characterized by Paul, (Acts xx. 32), whom he had before denominated, (ver. 17 and 28), elders and overseers—by which he describes other ministers, Philip i. 14, whom he speaks of in that passage as preaching the word—and which he often bestows upon the evangelists, Titus, and Timothy, and others, 2 Cor. ii. 13, viii. 18, 23, 1 Thess. iii. 2, &c. Should it be asserted then, that by the brethren here specified, besides the apostles and elders, may be intended the evangelists and prophets in the city of Jerusalem, as well as any other ministers who might be then in that place, it might be difficult to disprove it. Nor can the contrary be established from the term multitude, or *πληθος* (ver. 12), which is applied to that assembly, for we see the same name given (chap. xxiii. 7, compared with chap. xxii. 30), to the Jewish sanhedrin, a court of rulers only, and which probably was not more numerous than this Christian council. In chap. i. 15, a similar name is given to an assembly consisting only of a hundred and twenty persons: “And the number (*οχλος*) of the “names,” says Luke, or, as the same word is more literally translated, (Luke xii. 1. &c.), “*the multitude* of the “names, was about one hundred and twenty.” The meaning, therefore, of the phrase, (Acts xv. 22), “It pleased the “apostles and elders, with the whole church,” or, as the word very frequently signifies, rather “the whole assembly “(*εκκλησια*),” may be, that the decision which was given was perfectly unanimous, or that what was proposed obtained the complete concurrence of the apostles and elders, and other ministers, who were members of this assembly. And that the term *εκκλησια*, here rendered church, but which more properly should be translated assembly, denotes often an assembly of rulers only, was endeavoured, you know, to be proved before, not only from the authority of Demosthenes, but of the Septuagint. Besides, that it is so to be interpreted here seems evident from this, that as the *reference was made only* to the apostles and stated pastors at Jerusa-



iem, as well as the prophets and evangelists, who also were elders, it appears necessary, upon every principle of fair explanation, to understand “by the whole of the rest of the “assembly, or *ἐκκλησία*” (ver. 22), besides the apostles and ordinary elders, who delivered this decision, the other ministers alone, since to ministers alone the affair was submitted. And it deserves to be remarked, that the only individuals of the brethren, or as it is expressed, ver. 22, the rest of the assembly, who are here mentioned, and are said to have been leading men among them (*ἡγούμενοι*), are Judas and Silas, who are affirmed, in ver. 32, to have been prophets. But if by the phrases, *the whole of the rest of the assembly*, and *the brethren*, who are here spoken of, with the apostles and elders, are to be understood, not the members of the church at Jerusalem, but only the other ministers who composed that assembly, no argument can be adduced, from what is here said, to prove, that at this period, no more Christian members could be found at Jerusalem than could conveniently meet in one place\*.

The grand argument advanced by Mr. Ewing, in common with his predecessors, is founded upon Acts xxi. 22, “After all, however,” (says he, p. 32, speaking of the many ten thousands of Jews who were pointed out to Paul as professing the gospel) “no inference is drawn from the “many myriads of believers, that it would be impossible “for them to meet in one place†. We have an inference

\* Is it said with Glass, that this interpretation would attach to the term *church*, or rather, as the word signifies, *assembly*, a different meaning in ver 22, from that which it has in ver. 3, 4? It is answered, that this is admitted, but reasons have been assigned above for ascribing to it different acceptations in these verses. In ver. 22, it certainly can only denote the whole of that assembly, or *ἐκκλησία*, who were referred to; while, in the other verses, it may include also the common members at Jerusalem. The same remark too will hold as to the different acceptations of the term *brethren*, in ver. 22; and certainly it will be allowed, that when satisfactory reasons seem evidently to require it, different meanings may be attached to a word in the same chapter, and even in the same verse.

† Such an inference is never expressly stated, but such an inference is as clearly warranted by the facts which are recorded, as that which is drawn by our Saviour, (Matth. xii), from what is said in the Old Testament to David’s eating the shew-bread when he was hungry, though such an inference is not even hinted in the Book of Samuel.

“ of a very different kind. What is it therefore? The multitude (not the pastors and a few delegates from the rest, but the multitude) must needs come together.” But before this reasoning can be admitted to be conclusive, it must be proved by Mr. Ewing, that at that period, there was a universal concourse of the Christian Jews from *every quarter* to Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost, and that it was possible for the multitude who would then convene, to assemble in one place. The gospel had been preached, as was formerly observed, for almost thirty years, not only in Jerusalem and Judea, but in Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, and many other places, with wonderful success. In Jerusalem and Judea alone, during that space, many thousands were converted, and who, together with their children, who must now have arrived at the ears of maturity, would undoubtedly form a very great assembly. Now, if to these were added as many believing Jews as independents say came up from Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, and all the extensive regions where the gospel had been preached, the number of those who would be collected on this occasion could not be less than fifty or sixty thousand. But how could such a multitude meet together, in the very same building, for worship, or government, or the participation of the supper?—Was there any house which could have contained such a multitude? or, if such a house could be found, was there a single individual who could be heard by them? Besides, admitting all these, it was impossible that they should convene in the very same assembly for the purposes of government. The greater part of these myriads, by the confession of Mr. Ewing and other Independents, were not members of the church of Jerusalem, and consequently could not assemble with them for the ends of government, for if they were admitted to vote or judge at all, they would, on account of their number, have had a much greater share in the administration than the members at Jerusalem had. Would not this power, according to the Independent plan, have been completely subversive of the rights and privileges of the Christians at Jerusalem, for is it not one of their first principles, as has repeatedly been noticed, that the members of one congregation are not to be governed by the decisions of the members of any other congregation under heaven? And is it not evident, that whatever was the end for which, as James declares in the words referred to, (ver. 22), the Jews

would come together, when they heard that Paul was arrived, it could not be to take cognizance of the conduct of Paul in a *judicial capacity*. Paul was not a member of the church at Jerusalem, or of any church around, and, of course, even on the principles of Independents, neither the church at Jerusalem, nor any of the Jews who were there, had a right to meet as an ecclesiastical court, and decide upon his conduct. The truth seems to be, that James does not refer to any regular meeting of the church which was to take place, but to a tumultuous concourse, such as actually ensued, as soon as it was announced that Paul was at Jerusalem \*. But it is manifest, that the mere assertion that there would be a concourse of the Jews, however great, as soon as it was reported that Paul was at Jerusalem, will never demonstrate that the whole of the stated members in that city, as well as the many thousands from every other quarter, could meet in one place, either for instruction or communion, or the exercise of government. Neither, then from this, nor any other passage, does it appear that the whole of the Christians, residing in Jerusalem, could statedly assemble in the very same place. When we therefore reflect on the circumstances already mentioned, it seems necessarily to follow, agreeably to our first general observation, that there must have been a diversity of congregations in Jerusalem, each of which had its respective pastors, and its respective place for stated convention.

But, *in the second place*, if there was a number of congregations in this city, were they perfectly independent of each other in point of government, and did each of them constitute a completely distinct and disconnected society? No; for while they formed separate congregations, each of which had its particular pastors and stated ordinances, they were still so united, in point of government, as to be uniformly described but as *one church*. Never do we hear of the *churches* in Jerusalem, but *nine* times of the *church*, and twice, according to some, of *the whole church*, which was established in that city. But this is certainly inconsistent with the supposition, that each of these congregations constituted a separate and independent church, and directly

\* In proof of this, among other things, it is not said that a meeting of the members would be called by the apostles, or any of the rulers of the church, but simply, upon their hearing of his arrival, they would of themselves come together.

contradicts one of your favourite assertions, that the term *church*, in scripture, is never applied but to a single congregation, who could meet conveniently in the same place. Besides, when we examine the History of the Acts, we see that, in addition to the particular office-bearers who superintended these congregations, they had a general court, composed of the apostles and elders of the whole, who seem constantly to have administered their general concerns, as well as; perhaps, reviewed the decisions of subordinate courts. This court ordained the deacons, (Acts vi) ; received and distributed the contributions, (Acts xi. 30), which were sent, for the assistance of the poor at Jerusalem, by the brethren at Antioch ; and decided, (Acts xv), upon a reference which was made to them from the church at Antioch. And indeed, if they determined in an authoritative manner as to a reference which was made to them by another church at so great a distance, we may well believe that while they governed separately their different congregations in the city of Jerusalem, they met likewise occasionally as a general council, to judge in any appeals or references which were presented from these particular congregations. Again, are we not told, Acts xxi. 18, that when the apostle Paul had arrived at Jerusalem, he went in unto James ; and all *the elders* were present ? And does not this assembly of elders not only suggest to Paul the manner in which he should act on a particular occasion, but affirm, that they had formerly *concluded*, or *determined*, (*ἐπεκρίναντες*), respecting the power of the ceremonial law ? But does not this insinuate that there were meetings not only of the elders of each of the congregations to regulate the affairs of these particular congregations, but meetings also of the elders of the different congregations in that city, in a judicial capacity, to decide in matters of more general importance ? And if they met in common with ministers from Antioch, to decide in an appeal which was made to them by that church, much more would they meet with the ministers of any particular congregation in Jerusalem, to determine as to any appeal which might be made to them from that church. When we reflect then upon these facts, which have been attempted to be proved—that there was a number of congregations in the city of Jerusalem, each of which had its respective pastors, and its particular place for stated convention—and that, though thus distinct, and possessing their different elders and overseers,

they were yet so connected, in point of government, as to constitute only *one church*—and when we see the elders of these congregations assembling together in one common court, for deciding upon appeals from distant congregations—is it not obvious that the scheme of Independency, which asserts that there is not a higher court under heaven than the eldership or rulers of a particular congregation, and that one congregation, with its overseers, cannot be subjected to the review of the elders of a greater number of congregations, is completely repugnant to the pattern which is left us in this primitive church, and the explicit testimony of the word of God?

Is it affirmed, as usual, that these assertions, as to the number of congregations in Jerusalem, cannot be just, because, as has been now remarked, they are represented in scripture but as *one church*, whereas, had there been different congregations, they would have been expressly pointed out as different churches? It is replied, that we are sufficiently instructed, by the number of believers who resided in Jerusalem, by the variety of their ministers, and the diversity of languages, that there must have been a number of congregations in that city. To allege therefore, notwithstanding, that they must have been but one congregation, because they are described in scripture as but one church, would be no less unfair and inconsistent than to affirm, that, because all the various believers in the world are also denominated *one church*, (Matth. xvi. 18), and *one flock*, (John x. 16. 1 Peter v. 3, &c.), there is but one congregation in the world.

The whole nation of Israel moreover, as has been remarked, when it included almost two millions of persons, is pointed out to us but as *one church*, (Acts vii. 38), and we never hear that at any period, during the ancient dispensation, they comprehended more churches. But yet we know that even from the earliest times, when they met, to be taught by the priests and the Levites, it must have been in a number of distinct and separate congregations; and, agreeably to this, we are informed, (Psal. lxxiv), of many synagogues which had been built for this purpose in the land of Judea. Why then might not the believers in Jerusalem, and why may not the believers in any city or country, though meeting in various and separate societies, be pointed out likewise as but one church?



Is it asserted, as was done by the ancient Independents, that though it could be proved that there was a number of congregations in Jerusalem, and that these congregations were governed by a common court consisting of the apostles, who were entitled to superintend all the churches in the world, no argument can be adduced from it, for the right of ordinary inferior ministers, from various congregations, to assemble as a Presbytery, and review the decisions of the elders or rulers of a particular congregation? It is replied, that the apostles are pointed out in scripture not only as extraordinary ministers, but in the ordinary character of elders or rulers: 1 Peter v. 1. To affirm therefore with Independents, that it was an extraordinary act, because it was done by apostles, is to beg the question; nay, if the same principle were applied to their conduct in other instances, it would be attended with consequences the most destructive to Independency. Upon the same grounds it would follow, that since *the apostles* are said to have preached, to have dispensed the sacraments, and to have ordained deacons, these acts were extraordinary, and ought not now to be performed by ordinary ministers, whether Independent or Presbyterian. But if the mere circumstance of its being related in scripture, that *the apostles* met as a court of review, and superintended the affairs of all the churches in Jerusalem, will not demonstrate that their conduct, in this instance, is to be viewed as extraordinary, it becomes necessary to ascertain by other considerations whether it was so. And when we attend to these considerations, we find reason to conclude that it was not extraordinary, for both the nature of the thing, and the admission of ordinary teaching elders to sit with them in this court and to exercise along with them the same authority, clearly point out to us an opposite deduction. The last of these privileges could never have been granted to them, had the conduct of the apostles in this instance been extraordinary, and consequently not intended to be imitated at present by ordinary ministers. Ordinary ministers were certainly then as little entitled, had this been an extraordinary power, to claim a share of it, as ordinary ministers in the present day. Nor were they allowed merely to express their acquiescence in what was said or determined by the apostles (as Silvanus and others, whose names are recorded in the Apostolic Epistles, were), but they possessed an equality of power; for the decisions which were delivered in this eccle-

siastical court are called expressly, "the decrees of the elders," as well as of the apostles. It is obvious then, that the apostles did not act in these courts of review as extraordinary ministers; and, by admitting into that council, which governed the affairs of all the congregations in Jerusalem, ordinary office-bearers, we are warranted to say, that the ordinary elders of a number of congregations are now entitled to meet as a Presbytery, and examine the decisions of any particular eldership, or determine in matters which relate to the interests of all these congregations.

Or, is it objected, as is done by Glass, that it cannot be proved that there were stated elders in each of the congregations in the city of Jerusalem who governed these congregations, and who, when united as a court, regulated the affairs which respected them all? It is a sufficient answer, that it cannot be proved *that there was not* in each of them a fixed and stated eldership who superintended it; and it is most probable, from the constitution of other congregations, as well as from what is elsewhere said of Paul and Barnabas, (Acts xiv. 23, "that they ordained elders in every church," or, as Independents would explain it, in every congregation), that there were such office-bearers. At any rate, and this is the point at present in debate, it seems evident that each of these congregations was not independent of the controul of the overseers of others in point of government, but that there was a court corresponding to what we should denominate a Presbytery, composed of the elders of the different congregations, who exercised an authoritative power over each, as well as decided in matters of general importance. The former, though probable from every thing that is said of a Christian congregation in the New Testament, is a point of inferior magnitude only, and, in some circumstances, has been determined, as to other churches, by convenience and utility. The latter is a point of higher moment, and, though completely opposite to the principles of Independents, appears to be established from the circumstances which have been specified. In some of the *foreign* Presbyterian churches moreover, where the people are neither allowed to judge nor to vote, there are no private Sessions in particular congregations, but the elders or rulers of a number of congregations, associated as a Presbytery, superintend the affairs of each of these congregations, and determine in matters which concern the whole. Even then, if we suppose that the church at

Jerusalem was constituted upon the last of these plans, it is plain that every congregation which belonged to it, was not, in point of government, independent of the authoritative superintendence of the ministers of the rest. And if we admit that it was formed like all other churches in the New Testament, and that each of its congregations had its separate office-bearers who governed it, and that these again were connected in a general court, with the office-bearers of the rest, who decided in matters of common concern, the same conclusion follows. These congregations in Jerusalem, even in the days of the apostles, were not independent of each other with regard to government, and therefore congregations ought certainly not to be independent in the present day.

Finally, it is affirmed, with Lockier and others, that the sphere of ruling and of teaching should be equal, because the Thessalonians are commanded "to know them who were over them in the Lord, and who laboured or preached among them?" 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. It is answered, that though they be enjoined there to know those who laboured among them in word and doctrine, and were over them in the Lord, it will not follow from this, that none were to be over them in the Lord, unless they thus statedly laboured amongst them. Though the former class of rulers were entitled to their respect, it can never be inferred that a separate order, who were to govern but not to preach to them, were not entitled also to their dutiful regards. If this injunction does not prevent, even among Independents, those who do not statedly labour, from occasionally preaching to them, or dispensing the sacrament, why should it prevent those who do not statedly labour among them, from occasionally meeting to oversee and superintend them, as well as to determine in matters of general concern? To assert, in fine, that because, in the passage before us, Christians are called to honour those who not only ruled but taught among them, there can be no other rulers who can meet, from the elderships of other congregations, for deliberation, is to take for granted the thing to be proved. It is as if an inhabitant of Glasgow should say, Because I am commanded by the Constitution to honour the Magistrates under whose superintendence I live, there can be no other part of the Constitution which enjoins me to be subject to a Sheriff, because he does not dwell amongst us—or to the Lords of Session, be-

cause they are so far removed from us. But if reasoning like this would be accounted absurd in our political government, must it not be equally absurd to infer from this command, which enjoins Christians to honour those who reside amongst them and rule over them, that there can be no other court appointed to review the decisions of the former, because the office-bearers in it do not statedly reside, and preach, and rule amongst them?

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 LETTER XVII.

SIR,

AMONG the different arguments which have been urged by Presbyterians for courts of review, none undoubtedly is more striking or satisfactory than that which is drawn from the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. You have been pleased particularly to consider this passage, and have endeavoured to overturn the reasoning of your opponents. Before concluding the present inquiry, it will therefore be proper to examine the force of this argument, and the validity of the reasons on which you object to its cogency.

Prior to your remarks on this celebrated chapter, you observe with triumph (though as to the first part of your assertion, I know not upon what authority), that “although it is *pretty generally* allowed that *little* can be pleaded in support of the Presbyterian form of church-government from the *Apostolic Epistles*, there is a well known passage in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, on which the defence of this system is generally rested. This,” say you, “I long considered as a strong hold in which I could sit in safety, and subscribe myself a Presbyterian. I shall now shortly state the arguments by which, in my apprehension at least, it was no longer tenable.” But instead of proceeding at present to review these arguments in order, permit me briefly, after adverting to the occasion of this reference from Antioch, to consider in the first place, The *form* of that assembly to which the reference is said to have been made. Secondly, Whether the decision which it delivered upon this occasion was simply

an advice, or an authoritative determination? And in the third place, Whether the members of it were guided in their proceedings by a supernatural influence, or were left to the exercise of their own prudence and sagacity, with the common aids of the sacred Spirit.

The occasion then of the reference, as narrated in the two first verses of the chapter, was this: Certain men, from Judea (probably believing Pharisees), had come down to Antioch, and taught the Christians there, that unless they were circumcised after the manner of Moses, they could not be saved. As this doctrine was contrary to that of Paul and Barnabas and their fellow-ministers, who were at that time at Antioch, a keen discussion ensued. Still, however, the Judaizing teachers refused to yield; and as a harmonious decision could not be obtained from the associated ministers at Antioch, or a decision at least sufficient to silence the former, it was agreed that it should be submitted to the determination of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. This proposal accordingly was put in execution, and Paul and Barnabas were appointed, on the one side, to go up to Jerusalem, and state their sentiments, as the Pharisaic teachers seem to have been nominated on the other, to support their views; and a meeting of the apostles and elders having been called, and the point discussed, a decision was made, and transmitted to Antioch. That we may discover then whether what is here recorded affords any precedent for courts of review as held by Presbyterians, let us consider, in the First place, *the form* of this assembly.

On this point there has been much variety of opinion. By Mr. Glass, yourself, and other Independents, it has been considered as composed of the church at Jerusalem together with her rulers, and the whole of the apostles; and the reference is supposed to have been simply that of one church to another. "The church of Jerusalem," says the first of these writers, in his Second Letter to Ayton, vol. i. p. 385, "the first church, where our Lord left his apostles when he ascended, had this pre-eminence above all other churches unto which the word came, that the word of God came first out from it; and that other churches had their order, and the ordinances of Christ, from that church." In proof of this he quotes Isaiah ii. 1—4, and Micah iv. 1, 2, 3. And afterwards he says, (p. 386,) "When the believing Gentiles were troubled with this question, Whether



“this was a part of the doctrine of repentance and remission  
 “of sins to be preached to the Gentiles in Christ’s name,  
 “beginning at Jerusalem? where were they to seek the de-  
 “cision of it but there, where it was the Lord’s will, that  
 “the doctrine of repentance and remission of sins should  
 “begin, and from thence go forth unto all nations? And  
 “what society should determine this question, but that so-  
 “ciety wherein he gave orders about it, and from which he  
 “would have that doctrine to proceed, and go forth to the  
 “nations?” But when the reference is presented, no men-  
 tion is made of the *members* at Jerusalem, though there is of  
 the apostles and elders, a circumstance which is unaccount-  
 able, if it was simply an appeal from one church to another;  
 for if the constitution of the church at Jerusalem was Inde-  
 pendent, it must have been known at Antioch that the votes  
 of the *members*, who were twenty times more numerous  
 than the apostles and elders, would determine the question.  
 Besides, as was observed also, none but the apostles and el-  
 ders are said to have come together to consider the matter.  
 If Mr. Glass’s account however be just, ought not the  
*members* to have been summoned, and the decree to have  
 been called *their* decree, as well as that of the apostles and  
 elders. Besides, is it not most whimsical and absurd to  
 maintain that the Christian church at Jerusalem, because it  
 was the first church on earth, and the residence of the apos-  
 tles, was invested for almost thirty years with an universal  
 Episcopacy over every other church? Such an inference is  
 not supported by the passages quoted from Isaiah and Micah.  
 They assert indeed, that the gospel was *to begin* to be preach-  
 ed from Jerusalem, but not a syllable is mentioned, either  
 there or elsewhere, of the right of the church which was to  
 be formed in that city, to determine the faith of every other  
 church during the apostolic age, or in any other period.  
 Though this power might be vested in the apostles as ex-  
 traordinary ministers, on what principle could it be granted  
 to the members at large of the church at Jerusalem? Was  
 their opinion necessary to confirm the dictates of inspira-  
 tion? or was it safe to submit the decisions of the apostles  
 to their judgment and vote? Nay, even when the apostles  
 were referred to as ordinary ministers, on what ground could  
 the members indiscriminately claim a right not only of de-  
 claring, to the church which applied to them, the true doc-  
 trine of repentance, but (as will be afterwards proved) of au-

thoritatively laying on them whatever burdens they chose?—This assembly, then, could not be merely a meeting of the members of the church at Jerusalem, together with the apostles and elders; and consequently the reference from the Christians at Antioch could not be an application from one Independent church to another.

But though this assembly at Jerusalem cannot be allowed to be the meeting of a particular congregation only, did it resemble a Presbyterian Synod in every respect, and include representatives from the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, as well as of Jerusalem? Such was the opinion of the Presbyterian Divines in the Westminster Assembly—of the London Ministers—of Wood, Ayton, Hall, and Muir; but this, whether the case or not, is by no means necessary for our present argument in support of Presbytery. The appointment of the ministers of the different churches *next* to any congregation to constitute a Presbytery, for reviewing the deeds of the overseers of that congregation, and the appointment of the ministers of various Presbyteries *next* to a Presbytery to form a Synod, for reviewing the conduct of that particular Presbytery, are matters altogether *circumstantial*, not essential to the first principles of Presbytery, and adopted *merely from convenience*. It is not of fundamental importance in Presbytery, whether its courts of review are composed of the ministers whose local situation is *nearest* each other, or of ministers who are placed at a *considerable distance*; or whether a Synod be made up of a particular number of separate Presbyteries, or of an assemblage of ministers from different and more remote places, but superior in number to those who constitute the Presbytery from which a reference is made to them. These circumstances must be determined from the particular pleasure and situation of those churches which agree in government, and can be more easily arranged in modern times than among ancient believers. Though then it could not be proved that there was a Synod at Jerusalem corresponding in all respects to a modern Synod, it will by no means, as Independents have often asserted, enervate the argument. The grand point to be ascertained is simply this, Were the ministers and church of Antioch subordinate, in this reference, to the authoritative review of a number of other ministers convened at Jerusalem as ministers of Christ, though the assembly should have resembled strictly neither a Presbytery, nor

Synod, nor any such association? If this can be established, all the other arrangements will necessarily follow, and nothing more is requisite to demonstrate their propriety\*.

We are expressly told, that the church at Antioch referred the matter, for a final decision, to the assembly convened at Jerusalem, and that by this decision they determined to abide. The members of this court, as was before proved, appear to have been office-bearers alone: and even *the brethren*, who are joined with the apostles and elders in the letter which was written by this assembly, seem to have been of this description; and were either prophets and evangelists, or other ministers, who were at that time at Jerusalem. The other members, besides these brethren, were the common elders of the congregations in Jerusalem, and the apostles, who, even as uninspired teachers, were univer-

\* "The positive precepts of scripture," said a very distinguished character, when speaking on the subject of church-government, "are so expressed as to comprehend every possible case which can occur in the subject to which they relate; and, in referring to them, there can never be a deficiency either of direction or authority. But when we refer to scriptural examples for the authority of modern practice, we must not forget that an example could not go beyond the circumstances of the particular case in which it occurred, although by fair inference or analogy it may authorize many things which that case did not require or admit of. The application of the church at Antioch to what has been called the council of Jerusalem, is an example and authority for a *reference* from an inferior to a superior court. The example could in this point go no farther from the nature of the case. But its *authority* goes far beyond it. It is quite sufficient to authorize an appeal or a complaint (as well as a reference) from an inferior court to a superior, and every other jurisdiction of the superior which the circumstances require. It authorizes not merely the subordination of one inferior to one superior court, which is all that the example mentions, but such a gradation of court-jurisdiction as the circumstances of the church of Christ, in different situations, render expedient. This is but one illustration—but the idea may be illustrated by a multitude of similar cases, and shews the absurdity of the conduct of Independents, who, while they neglect or explain away a great part of the *practice* which is clearly found in the Bible, affect to fix down the practice of modern times to the precise *letter* of the *examples* they choose to refer to, though ever so contrary to their *true spirit* and *design*. Every pin of Presbytery could not possibly be found in any scripture-example, although the general system is not only explicitly but clearly authorized by the practice of the primitive church *as far as the cases occurred*."

sal pastors and ministers to all the churches in the world.— Here then is one fact which appears to be ascertained, that there was a reference from the ministers and members at Antioch to another court at Jerusalem, which was not only competent completely to decide on the question referred, but *which*, even as uninspired, possessed the high authority of a general council, which could give universality to its decrees, and composed, as far as is recorded, of none but office-bearers.

But admitting that there was a reference here to another court, consisting of ecclesiastical office-bearers only, what was the degree of power which they exercised? Did they communicate an advice only to the ministers at Antioch? or did they deliver a subordinately authoritative decision? That the latter, and not the former, was the degree of power which they are said to have exercised, appears, agreeably to our *Second* position, to be very clearly manifested from the following considerations:

The decision which they delivered, as was before stated, is called a *decree*, Acts xvi. 4; and the word *δογμα*, there rendered decree, in the only other four instances where it occurs in the New Testament, denotes, not merely an advice or opinion, but a law, or highly authoritative injunction.— Thus, in Luke ii. 1, and Acts xvii. 7, it signifies the decrees of the Roman Emperor, which certainly were more than simple advices; and in Eph. ii. 15, and Col. ii. 14, the ordinances or commandments of the ceremonial law, which certainly were more than admonitions. It is used also by the Seventy, in their translation of Dan. ii. 13, iii. 10, 29, and iv. 6, to express the decrees or mandates of Nebuchadnezzar and Dan. vi. 8, 9, 12, 15, 26, the imperial decrees of Darius, as well as in two of the verses of that chapter, to signify the laws of the Medes and Persians, which altered not. Nor does the verb *δογματίζω*, in Col. ii. 20, the only instance produced by Independents in support of their opinion, seem to denote subjection merely to doctrine or instruction, but, as our translators have rendered it, to ordinances or commandments.— The things, for their undue subjection to which Paul reproves the Colossians, are called in ver. 22, the *commandments* of men, *ενταλματα*, by which we are unquestionably to understand the ceremonial precepts of the Mosaic law, which were originally binding as the commandments of God,

but at that time were obligatory, upon those who chose to obey them, only as the commandments of men \*.

Not only, however, is the decision of the apostles and elders called a decree, but we are informed, Acts xvii. 4, it was *ordained* by them, *κατακείμενον*, a word which, when applied to an assembly, and added to the former, imports the most decided exercise of authority. It is employed for instance, by the Seventy, in their version of Esther ii. 1, to express the judgment of a Persian council against Queen Vash-ti, when they *decreed* that she should be degraded from her regal situation; and the word *συγκριμα*, which is derived from it, is used, in their translation of Dan. iv. 17, 24, &c. to signify *a decree*. And in Acts xxiv. 6, it denotes the authority of the Jewish sanhedrin, or council of the elders, which Tertullus declares was ready to have proceeded to pronounce judgment upon Paul—as in Acts xiii. 27, it expresses the authority of this very court, when they tried and condemned the blessed Saviour. I do not, indeed, recollect a single instance where it is not to be so understood, when applied to an assembly of judges or rulers.

The conduct, moreover, of the apostles and elders, on this occasion, is expressed by their laying what appeared to them *a necessary burden* on the church of Antioch, than which words, I apprehend, few can be conceived more strongly descriptive of the exercise of authority. Nor is it of any importance to object that the verse should be rendered, “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, that no burden shall henceforth be laid upon you but these necessary things,” and to assert that this burden is the same thing with *the yoke* mentioned, ver. 10, for still, as Mr. Ewing allows, p. 74, 75, it implies that a burden was laid on them. When we are told, Matth. xxiii. 4, that the Pharisaic Rabbis bound heavy burdens upon the shoulders of men, do we not perceive something more than mere instruction or admo-

\* Accordingly *δογματίζεσθε*, in Col. ii. 20, is explained, in the very ancient Syriac version, by a word which is equivalent to *judicamini*—“Are ye judged by these commandments?” by Erasmus and Bullinger, “*Decretis tenemini*—Are ye bound by these decrees of men?” by Gualther, Stephanus, and Beza, “*Ritibus oneramini*—Are ye loaded with these rites or observances?” and by Budæus, Leigh, Parkhurst, Wetstein, and Kypke, “Have ye these decrees or ordinances imposed upon you? or, Are you subject to these ordinances?”



nition designed, and that they delivered them as their *ενταλματα*, or commandments, Matth. xv. 9, which all were to obey who wished to be considered as of their sect? In fine, this *decree ordaining necessary things or burdens*, we are informed, ver. 28, seemed good to them, as well as to the Holy Ghost: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and," as it is in the Arabic version, "it seemed good to us."—And that this denotes a judicial decision seems manifest, not only from what has been already stated, but from the import of this phrase, when applied to the decision of an assembly of rulers. Thus Josephus (Antiq. book iv. chap. viii), speaking of a decree of their great sanhedrin, disobedience to which was punished by death, represents it as *το δοκουν*; i. e. "what seemed good to them." Thus too, Demosthenes, as quoted by Stephanus, *δεδοχθαι τη βουλη*, "it is decreed by the senate;" and Plato, as cited by Budæus, *δεδοκται μοι καθανειν*, "it is certainly appointed for me to die." Whether, then, we consider these expressions separately, or attend to them as united, nothing seems plainer than that the decision which was given by this assembly at Jerusalem was not merely an advice or a declaration, whether they had commissioned these heretical teachers who had come down to Antioch to publish their errors, or whether what was taught by them was agreeable to the doctrine of repentance unto life, but an authoritative determination, to which the church at Antioch was bound most cheerfully to submit in the Lord.

Still however, though this was an authoritative determination, are we certain that they were not directed in it by a miraculous influence? That this was the case is asserted by Mr. Glass, in his Letters to Ayton, where he says, that "the apostles acted in this council as apostles, "and were guided by an extraordinary miraculous influence." Mr. Ewing also says, that the reference was made to the apostles, as inspired; that the elders too, who were joined with them, were probably inspired; that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were very generally enjoyed in the church at Jerusalem; and that when the minister of this court pronounced these words, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost "and to us," they spoke them unquestionably as infallible men. And you avow this to be your own opinion, and endeavour to defend it by a variety of arguments. Let us then inquire, *Thirdly*, Whether they were directed by this

influence in the case before us, or were left to the exercise of their own wisdom and sagacity?

That the apostles were not uniformly directed by a miraculous influence I think you must grant, if you reflect for a moment on what is recorded in the gospel-history. Many of their actions, as was formerly noticed, such as the ordination of deacons, the dispensation of the sacraments, the preaching of the word, and, in many instances, the government of the church, did not require such a preternatural influence, for they were performed by men who were not inspired, and are still performed by men who have no miraculous influence, either of suggestion or of superintendence. To prove that what was done in this assembly was the dictate of inspiration, it is not sufficient to say that it was done partly by apostles, since even *they* were not always miraculously guided, but were left, with the common ministers of the church in every age, to their own wisdom and reflection, and the usual aids of the divine Spirit. You must produce something either from the subject of reference which was submitted to their investigation, or from their mode of procedure, or from their express declaration, or from the subsequent testimony of the sacred historian, before your hypothesis can be admitted. But from none of these, I apprehend, can this deduction be made, while, on the contrary, it seems probable, from a number of circumstances, that, in the whole of this business, they acted only as common ministers.

In the *first* place, Paul and Barnabas, at the original discussion at Antioch, acted not in the high character of apostles, but only of ordinary ministers. Had not this been the case, they could never have submitted to the *τελευτις* or appointment of the church at Antioch to go up to Jerusalem, (Acts xv. 2), for as an apostle, Paul was far superior to them all, as Barnabas was to many of them, and could never have been authoritatively appointed by them. But had these ministers, when they delivered the very same opinion, as to the mind of the Spirit, which was afterwards affirmed in the council at Jerusalem, acted as inspired, or as directed by a miraculous superintending energy, can we suppose for a moment, that in supporting their pretensions, they would resign the extraordinary character which they assumed, and submit to a common decision of the office-bearers, appointing them to go up as commissioners to Jerusalem for

the decision of the cause? What right had the ministers, or members, at Antioch, to ordain these extraordinary ministers of Christ, who, inspired, or miraculously directed by his Spirit, had made known to them a part of his will, to go up to Jerusalem to ascertain whether the doctrine which they taught was true, and whether it corresponded with that of the other apostles, or to obtain *any* determination from these ministers on that subject? If Paul and Barnabas however, though extraordinary ministers at the beginning of this business, did not act as extraordinary, but as ordinary ministers, this is one point at least, in which their pre-eminent character was laid aside; and it must require very strong evidence to convince us, that when the rest of the apostles met at Jerusalem, and delivered precisely *the very same determination*, they acted in a character in any degree superior.

2dly, If this question was to be determined by inspiration, it was unnecessary to have gone to Jerusalem for the decision. Paul certainly, as well as the other inspired ministers, was as able to have delivered such a decision as the apostles at Jerusalem; and unquestionably if evidence had been presented to the ministers of the church of Antioch, that the Holy Ghost, in a supernatural manner, had settled the matter, by communicating to them his will through a single minister, it must have been as decisive as if he had spoken to them by twelve. Is it said, that the Judaizing teachers at Antioch might have represented the other apostles at Jerusalem as of a different mind from Paul and Barnabas? It is replied, that not a single hint of this is mentioned in the whole of the narrative, a circumstance which is surprising, if that was the ground of the reference. Besides, the miracles which were performed by Paul as an extraordinary minister, when, in this as well as other parts of the doctrine which he delivered, he laid claim to the character of an infallible teacher, (Gal. iii. 5), must have completely silenced such an objection, and satisfied the minds of the christians at Antioch. Certainly it must have occurred to the brethren in that city, that the Holy Ghost could not contradict himself, and that he would not enable Paul to perform amongst them the same striking miracles in attestation of his doctrine, on the point in question, which he did at Galatia for that very purpose, if the sentiments of this minister had been contrary to those of the other inspired

teachers. Since, then, had an inspired decision been wanted by the office-bearers and brethren at Antioch, Paul was as competent to have delivered it as the whole of the apostles, and since the evidence which he could produce, in confirmation of his decision, was as strong as theirs, nay, completely demonstrated that his mind, upon this subject, was the same with theirs, it seems plain that the determination which they wished, upon this occasion, must have been of a different description. Paul and Barnabas, it would appear, acted only as ordinary ministers, and, in the discussion which first of all took place at Antioch, stated what appeared to them to be the mind of God from an examination of the scriptures, while the Pharisaic teachers, on the contrary, who made very high pretensions to a knowledge of the Old Testament, obstinately defended an opposite opinion. As the veneration which was still paid to the latter for their knowledge of the law, even by the converted Jews, was extreme, and as Paul and they could not agree, it was resolved that the matter should be referred to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. By their determination of the sense of the law, upon this interesting topic, both parties were to be regulated; and in ascertaining its sense, it seems plain that it was not expected that they should be guided by inspiration, for had inspiration been wanted by them to settle the question, or had Paul laid claim to it when he delivered his opinion, and confirmed his pretensions to it by undeniable miracles, it is obvious that no reference could have been made to Jerusalem. The Spirit which performed miracles by Paul, in attestation of his opinion, could not oppose the Spirit who dwelt in the apostles; and consequently it must have been utterly improper, as well as unnecessary, to have sent to Jerusalem to see whether Paul's sentiments accorded with theirs, or whether the apostles had commissioned these men from Judea to teach the doctrine which Paul condemned, or for any purpose that Independents have specified.

In the 3d place, The persons to whom this reference was made, were not only apostles but ordinary elders. When Paul and Barnabas, (Acts xv. 2), had had no small dissension and disputation with the false teachers at Antioch, the rulers of that church determined that these ministers should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. If then, as is plain, the term *elder* is employed in scripture to represent only ordinary ministers of Christ, or

extraordinary ministers in their *ordinary capacity*, and if the reference, in this case, was made to these ministers *equally* with the apostles; if they *met officially* "*to consider the matter,*" (ver. 6),—claim *authoritative superiority* to the false teachers, and declare that they were entitled to teach nothing but what they *commanded* them, (ver. 24)—*decide* on the question, and say that it seemed good to *them*, as well as to the apostles and the Spirit, to lay upon the brethren at Antioch necessary burdens, (ver. 28); and if the decision which was made be called *their decrees*, as well as the decrees of the apostles, (chap. xvi. 4); it seems necessarily to follow, that the apostles, as well as elders, must have acted here only as ordinary ministers. Had not this been the case, it was impossible for the elders *to be judges at all*. The apostles alone being extraordinary rulers, and possessed of miraculous influence, elders could *have submitted* only, and not *judged*; for men who were uninspired could certainly not add, by their councils or opinions, to the dictates of inspiration, and much less could they be requisite to prevent it from erring: consequently, since they, as well as the apostles, are said to be referred to as judges, and to have discharged this duty, the apostles must have acted, on this occasion, only as *ordinary* ministers.

Mr. Ewing, indeed affirms, p. 19, that the elders specified, were probably, endowed with the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost. This, however, is a gratuitous assertion, for no part of the sacred history supports it.—Besides, though it were admitted that some of the ordinary ministers, as well as the members, of many primitive churches were possessed of these gifts, it cannot be demonstrated that it was the universal attainment of *all* the common pastors of this, or any of these primitive churches\*, while, on the contrary, it can be evinced that the term *elder* is applied usually in scripture to officers who have no such miraculous endowments, nor extraordinary character. Is it alleged, moreover, as Mr. Ewing does, that the message from Antioch was intended to ascertain not merely a point of doctrine, but also a point of fact—not merely whether Gentile believers must be circumcised, but whether the men from

\* If there were only six elders, or even one elder, in this assembly, who was not inspired, and yet was allowed to judge, all the rest must have acted only as ordinary ministers, otherwise he could not have judged, but could only have submitted.



Judea had been sent by these ministers at Jerusalem to teach the brethren at Antioch to this effect ? It is answered, that it is obvious from the sacred narrative, as has been already proved, that the elders, not less than the apostles, were directly applied to, to decide the controversy or question, as well as to ascertain the fact (if an application for the latter purpose was made at all) ; that they equally came together *to consider of the matter*—and this certainly could not be the *matter* of fact, for of that there could be no doubt ; that they both authoritatively, not merely ascertained a fact, but laid necessary burdens, or things, upon the church at Antioch ; and that the *decrees* which they passed, not unquestionably about a fact, but about the question referred, are denominated the decrees of both. Or is it affirmed again with that writer, that it is not wonderful that the brethren at Antioch should have joined the apostles and elders together in their message, when the apostles sometimes class themselves in the same manner \*, and, on this occasion, take along with them not only the elders, but the whole church in their reply ? We observe, that it is yet to be demonstrated that the whole of the common members of the church, as well as the elders, were included by them in their reply ; and that the contrary has at least been attempted to be established. And as when Peter denominates himself, in the passage here cited, an elder or presbyter, he speaks of himself only as a common ruler, so, in this light, I contend that he, as well as his fellow apostles, are to be viewed in this meeting at Jerusalem. Besides, even if this term, when applied to that apostle, was descriptive of him as an extraordinary minister of Christ, it is plain that when it is bestowed upon ordinary ministers, as in the case before us, it must be understood in a completely different sense.— And though Paul joins with himself others who were not apostles, in the salutations and benedictions which he delivers in his Epistles to several Christian churches, he never says of himself and these inferior ministers, It seemed good to us, and the Holy Ghost, to lay upon you necessary burdens ; and never, as was before noticed, are his epistles to these churches called, like these decrees, the Epistles of Paul and Timothy, or Paul and Silvanus. These were prerogatives to which none of the companions of Paul were admitted,

\* See 1 Peter v. 1

but prerogatives which are ascribed, in the present case, to the elders as well as apostles ; and consequently this circumstance, in the view of every candid and unprejudiced mind, must mark an equality of power, as having been exercised by them in the instance before us.

Farther, is it maintained with Glass \*, that when “ we read of the apostles, and elders, and brethren, acting in this matter, we must understand that every one of them did the part that was proper to them ? that the apostles brought forth and infallibly declared the mind and will of the Lord Christ upon this subject ; that the presidents or elders of the church in Jerusalem went before the brethren *as ensamples of subjection* unto the revelation of the mind and will of the Lord by the apostles, and were their leaders in this matter ; and that the brethren *obeyed* and *submitted themselves* to their presidents and guides, who agreed in judging according to the mind and will of Christ brought forth by the apostles ?” The same objections seem to present themselves to this, as to the preceding explanations. On this supposition, it is evident that the elders did not judge, with regard to the point of controversy, any more than the common members at Jerusalem, or *even than the members at Antioch* ; that all that they did, was merely, like the brethren in Antioch and Jerusalem, *to submit* to the decision of the apostles ; and that the latter were the only arbiters in the business. But how can this be reconciled with what has been already stated, that the elders, as well as apostles, met officially to “ consider of the matter ?” Since, then, the business was referred to and determined by the elders as well as apostles, both of them must have acted only as ordinary rulers, for had any of them been directed as extraordinary ministers by a miraculous influence of suggestion or superintendence, the rest, as Glass very honestly confesses, could only have submitted, and could not have been allowed to judge at all.

Lastly, The manner of procedure, in this court, does not indicate that they acted as extraordinary ministers, or were directed by a supernatural influence from God. We are told by Luke, Acts xv. 7, that, in the beginning of their consultation, “ there was *much disputing* amongst them.” But surely those persons, whose decision was

\* See his Second Letter to Ayton.

not passed till after much disputation, could not all have been inspired, or do not, at least during the whole of their meeting, appear to have been guided by a miraculous influence. "Here, however, it may be remarked," say you, p. 42, "that the expression συζητησις seems by no means necessarily to imply opposition of sentiment, but simply mutual discussion or inquiry. It is indeed the same word rendered *disputation*, ver. 2, but there it is connected with another (εασις), translated dissension, which, from its use in other passages, clearly indicates the most decided opposition of sentiment. This is apparent from its being used, chap. xxiii. 7, 10, to denote the dissension that took place between the Pharisees and Sadducees. It would rather argue a tautology in the sacred writer, if, in ver. 2, of this chapter, he employs two words to express precisely the same idea." It by no means, however, appears a tautology to render συζητησις "*disputation*," in the 2d verse; for the word εασις, translated "*dissension*," may denote the opposition of sentiment that was between them, and συζητησις, the disputation which ensued in consequence of that dissension or contrariety of sentiment. Besides, we know that the verb from which it comes, is used in Acts vi. 9, to express *the disputation* which took place between Stephen and the Libertines, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians; and in Act ix. 29, the disputation of Saul against the Grecians; and a kindred-noun is employed by Paul, 1 Cor. i. 20, to signify *the disputer* of this world. That this is the sense in which συζητησις must be understood in the 7th verse, seems evident from this, that it is said that *after there had been much συζητησις*, Peter rose, and said, "Why tempt ye God to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" Had there been only, however, as you express it, "*mutual inquiry* on the subject," how could he reprobate what had been already said by them, as approaching almost to a tempting of God? Is *inquiry*, which is a duty when lawfully prosecuted, to be branded with *such a name*? And since the conduct of part at least of the present assembly (whether they simply *inquired*, as you contend that the word should be rendered, or keenly *disputed*, as others maintain) is distinguished by this name, as far as the business had already proceeded, is this consistent, I would ask you,

with the supposition, that they were either guided by an *infallible* energy, or by miraculous suggestion?

“ But waving your remark,” say you, p. 43, “ and admitting that there was really a debate in the church on this occasion, Dr. Doddridge’s Note on the passage seems extremely just. This dispute,” he observes, “ does not appear to have been among the apostles themselves.”— But how this observation, which appears to you so just, can be considered as admissible, I do not see. We are expressly told, ver. 6, after what had been mentioned of the dissensions which had taken place upon this subject at Antioch, and probably at Jerusalem, that *the apostles and elders came together to consider the matter*. Now, since this is stated in the very verse which goes before, it would naturally, I think, occur to any unprejudiced mind, that the much disputing mentioned in the next verse, must have happened only among the apostles and elders, who had *come together to consider the matter*. To none but them was the business referred; and as none but they are here represented to have assembled to deliberate upon it, on what principle can it be proved, either from the authority of Dr. Doddridge, or of any other writer, that any but the apostles and elders disputed? And if they had not *only* disputation, but *much* *disputation*, before they were even prepared to attend to the proposal which was made to them by Peter, is it probable that the assembly, during *the whole* of the discussion, was either supernaturally inspired, or miraculously superintended by the *same Sacred Spirit*? If this was the case, that Spirit, who is the author of order and not of confusion, of unity and not of discord, must as yet, at least, have stimulated the whole of this great assembly, who were all inspired, or conducted by his influence, to mutual controversy and mutual dissension.

But if *much* *disputation* prevailed in this assembly before they were addressed by Peter and James, what method was adopted by these apostles to bring them to unanimity, and to lead them to the decision which they at last passed? Did they lay claim to any extraordinary inspiration of the Spirit, to bend the mind of the dissentient brethren? or is it any where declared, that the Spirit, after this, descended, and disposed them to make an enlightened and harmonious determination? No, assuredly. None of these claims was made by Peter or his fellow-apostles, and no such extraordinary inspiring influence is even, in *the most distant manner*, affirm-

ed to have been communicated after this to any, or all of them. We are merely told, that Peter *reasoned* with them, to prove that the Gentiles need not to be circumcised in order to salvation, as any Christian minister might now do, from facts which were obvious and notorious to all. He informs them, that they all knew that a good while ago (alluding to the conversion of Cornelius), God made choice among them, that the Gentiles by his mouth should hear the word of the gospel ; and that God, who knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, bestowing upon them the Holy Ghost, in his miraculous gifts and saving benefits, even as he did to them ; and put no difference between the one and the other, purifying their hearts by faith. After this it is said, that, in confirmation of the same truth, Barnabas and Paul declared what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them : and then it is mentioned, that, to establish the same doctrine, James quoted a passage from the prophet Amos, as explicitly supporting the sentiments of his brethren. But what is there in this which bespeaks inspiration ? Was it impossible for them to deduce such conclusions from these miracles, these facts, and these prophecies, without being inspired, or directed by a miraculous influence ? If so, how can similar conclusions be now made on other subjects, and with perfect accuracy, by men who are neither so inspired nor directed ? If, however, on the contrary, as appears to be incontestable, all this might have been done by them then, as well as by ministers now, without the inspiration of suggestion or superintendence, and if neither they themselves, nor the sacred historian, claim for them either of these kinds of inspiration, on what principle can it consistently be maintained that they were, at this time, conducted by this miraculous energy ?

Is it objected further with Glass\*, that it cannot be demonstrated that the apostles and other ministers were not inspired, from their establishing their opinion by reasoning from miracles and ancient prophecies, because the same thing is done in all the inspired Epistles, which yet were written by an infallible influence ? It is answered, that if the mere circumstance of their reasoning does not appear of itself to prove that they were not inspired, it is at least a presumptive argument against it, unless their inspiration could be

\* See his Second Letter to Ayton.



evinced from other considerations ; and when viewed together with the circumstances which attended their reasoning, it seems to be completely decisive. Besides, there is a most striking difference between the reasonings of the apostles in their inspired Epistles, and in the case in question. Before they wrote their Epistles, they were fully satisfied of the mind of Christ as to the point of which they were to speak, and all the reasoning which they employ in them, under his direction, is simply to recommend it to their fellow-men. But here they assemble to ascertain his mind about a point as to which they were yet uncertain, and before they determine on it, so as to announce it to others, have much disputation and reasoning respecting it among themselves. It is evident therefore that the objection is not in point, and that before any thing can be adduced from it, a case must be produced in which a number of apostles and ordinary ministers met under extraordinary superintending influence to write an inspired Epistle, and before they determined upon what they should say, had much disputation and discussion among themselves. But this Mr. Glass never attempted to produce, and no Independent has ever been able to bring forward.

Or is it alleged with Doddridge, as quoted by you, p. 43. " That if the apostles really had debated the case awhile, their decision at last might have been under an unerring direction ; and that there appears to be no reason to conclude that their inspiration was always so instantaneous and express, as to supersede any deliberation of their own minds, or any consultation with each other ? " It is here conceded, that when the apostles and elders first met, they were not under an infallible miraculous influence ; and if they were not under that influence when they first convened, it will be difficult to ascertain, from the sacred history, when the *afflatus* or guidance began. It is also to be recollected, that if this assembly met and reasoned so long as to the mind of the Spirit, and yet were inspired from the period that they convened, or at last obtained this supernatural influence after *much disputation*, the case is so *extraordinary*, and so entirely different from every other instance of the inspiration of the Spirit recorded either in the Old or New Testament, that before it can be admitted, very explicit declarations of the fact must be produced. But none of these, we believe, can be found by any one who turns his attention to the nar-

rative of Luke ; and all that is mentioned by the Doctor, and other Independents, is, that *it might be the case*. On the whole, even though it were allowed that the apostles and elders might consult together before the Spirit was pleased to make known to them his will, I would ask any man, whether it is probable that he would suffer them to meet in his name as an inspired assembly (if they were referred to as such), and not merely advise with each other, but dispute, and even have so much disputation as that they are actually said to have been almost guilty of *tempting him* ?

In fine, you observe, p. 43, that “ no one calls in question the infallibility of this decision by whatever process it was formed. This, then,” you remark, “ is enough for our argument. While the apostles were at Jerusalem, while they could give an infallible answer to the question appealed to them ; while they could assuredly say, *That it seemed good to the Holy Ghost*, and quote miracles in support of the assertion ; then the church at Jerusalem was in a state totally peculiar, and an appeal to it, in such circumstances, forms no argument for a similar appeal to any other church.” We know assuredly, from the sacred records, that their decision was *just*, but that it was *inspired*, or *infallible*, is not stated. It is manifest that they *did not err* in their determination, but that they *might not have erred* in it, as well as in their debates and reasonings, is not asserted. Respecting therefore the possibility of their erring it is needless to debate, and it ought rather to be satisfactorily proved by Independents, that *they could not discover* the truth, on this subject, without such an influence—a point which as yet they have forgotten to demonstrate. Besides, that they were able to quote a miracle in confirmation of their opinion, which was wrought, *not during the time of their meeting* to determine their judgment, but a considerable time before, is no proof that they were inspired, or guided by an extraordinary infallible influence to draw from it a certain and just conclusion. *Any minister* of Christ, though not an apostle, nor inspired, nor guided by a supernatural energy, might certainly have drawn from it the inference which they did ; and we know that miracles, performed in the days of Christ and his apostles, can be adduced *by us now*, in support of many doctrines. Nor was there any thing extraordinary, as you would insinuate, in

their declaring that their decision had appeared good to the Holy Ghost. It evidently refers to its according with his revelation in the Old Testament scriptures as quoted by James, and with the miracle which he performed upon Cornelius and his house, and not to any new and supernatural communication. But what is there in this which may not now be asserted by the ministers of Christ, as is observed by the learned and judicious Whitaker\*, “if, like this assembly, they decree and determine nothing but from scripture, and if they shall examine all questions by the scripture, and shall follow the voice of scripture in all their decrees?” In short, not only do the apostles and elders say, that it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, but that it seemed good also to them, an expression which appears to be unaccountable, if they were either under an influence of suggestion or superintendence. Did any of the ancient prophets ever employ this language, “Thus saith the Lord, and thus saith we?” And if it was the Holy Ghost alone who now spake by the apostles, and decided the question, and if they gave an infallible decree only as his ministers or instruments, and with a consciousness of his inspiration, how could they represent it as seeming good to them distinct from the Spirit? Neither, then, from this, nor any other circumstance, has it yet appeared that this assembly was inspired, while, on the contrary, it seems manifest, from the considerations which have been mentioned, that they were left to the guidance of their own prudence and sagacity, and the common influences of the sacred Spirit.

\* See his Controv. iii, Quest. vi.

## LETTER XVIII.

SIR,

THE fifteenth of the Acts once appeared to you a strong hold, in which you could sit in safety and subscribe yourself a Presbyterian, but you have been induced, it seems, to capitulate to Independents, because you have been led to perceive that the case which it records was extraordinary, and affords no precedent for courts of review. Your reasons for adopting such a conclusion were the following :—

1st, You observe, p. 38, that the members at Jerusalem, as well as the rulers, are represented as all uniting in the decision which was formed on the question appealed\* ; and, in like manner, when the decision was transmitted to Antioch, it was the multitude, (ver. 30), plainly meaning the church at large, that was gathered together to receive it. “ This surely,” you add, “ savours much more of the Independent, than of the Presbyterian form of government.” It is yet however to be proved that the members from Antioch united as judges in this decision. And though all the members from Antioch had been present when the decision of the assembly at Jerusalem was delivered, all that could be inferred would be merely this, that the people have a right to *hear* the determinations of a superior court.

2dly, You remark, that “ there was something more in this case, which made it obviously very different from the Presbyteries or Synods of modern times. We have not, in this passage, an account of representatives assembled in convocation from a variety of different churches, where a certain number is essentially necessary to constitute what is termed the court : we have simply an application from one individual church to another, respecting a contested question that occurred, and that had been suggested by persons professedly coming from that church to which the application was made.” On this let it be observed, that the preceding reasoning was not intended to prove that

\* This certainly can never be considered as an appeal, but only a reference, for no contrary sentence was given at Antioch, from which any protest or appeal was made to Jerusalem.

the assembly at Jerusalem resembled either a modern Presbytery or Synod, but only that it constituted an ecclesiastical court *distinct* from that at Antioch, and to which the latter was subordinate. It is not contended that we find in it the model of either of these representative courts, but that it exhibits a most decided evidence of the subjection of one court of ordinary ministers to the authoritative review and superintendence of another. Since it is adduced, of course, only to establish *the general principle of subordination* to courts superior to an individual congregation, and since no argument is brought from it for the *particular* form of Presbyterian courts, the objection under consideration must be wholly irrelevant. Besides, it is to be remembered that the reference was not from one Christian church to another. Though the matter was referred to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, it is not said that it was referred to them as the ministers of Jerusalem. And, as was before remarked, since it is granted by your brethren that more than a simple advice was given, if it be affirmed that the ministers and church of Jerusalem exercised an act of authoritative power over the church of Antioch, unless it can be proved that the former were inspired, consequences will follow from it, subversive not merely of Presbytery, but even of Independency. If none but the ministers of the church in Jerusalem were applied to, then the ministers of a parent-congregation may be solicited by another congregation to decide what shall be taught and practised among them, in any case of difficulty, where they cannot themselves agree. But is not this to admit the principle of subordination to a court superior to the eldership of a particular congregation? and is it not better that the court, to which this subordination is to be yielded, should be composed of the ministers of several churches than only of one congregation? And if the members as well as ministers of the church at Jerusalem judged in the reference from Antioch, does it not follow, as was before noticed, that one Tabernacle-church may sit in judgment on the affairs of another? Might not the church in Glasgow determine what should be taught in the church at Dundee, and the church at Edinburgh exert an authoritative power over both? And will not this subordination of churches unavoidably ensue from your representation, unless you can prove that the church at Jerusalem was guided



by a miraculous infallible influence, which is not now vouchsafed to Christian congregations?

3dly, You affirm, that “the subject of the appeal was peculiar. It has indeed,” you say, “been matter of dispute, whether the question respecting the liberty of Gentiles related to all converts to Christianity, or only to those who were converted to Christianity from among such as were previously religious proselytes. It is not here necessary to enter into that discussion: it is sufficient to observe that whether it be understood to refer to the one or to the other, it was a question of very extensive importance at that time to the Christian world; a question of such a kind too, that no similar one can now occur, and which only needed once to be decided, effectually to settle the dispute at every succeeding period.”

The question which was discussed in this ecclesiastical court was certainly not of more general or striking importance than others which have been examined in many modern, uninspired, ecclesiastical courts. Will any Independent maintain, for instance, that *the doctrines of grace*, which, in the language of the Father of our glorious Reformation; are the *articuli stantis aut cadentis ecclesie*, (*i. e.* the points upon the reception or rejection of which the church must stand or fall), and which were discussed so fully in the Synod of Dort, were not of equal magnitude with the question which was considered at Jerusalem? It is manifest also, as was before shewn, that *the manner* in which this question was determined by this assembly, as far at least as is stated in scripture, was in no respect different from that in which questions may now be decided in ecclesiastical courts. May not they too, though not inspired, or miraculously guided, examine the scriptures, and the extraordinary works performed in the primitive ages of the church, and by these regulate the judgments which they pronounce? And it seems presumptuous to affirm that no similar question can ever again occur, and that this question needed only once to be determined, effectually to settle and silence the dispute. It is impossible for any one positively to say what differences of opinion may yet be discovered respecting the meaning of the sacred oracles, and differences which may, as in former times, even upon important points, divide the world. With regard to this question, besides, it is worthy of being remarked, that even after its determination by this assembly

at Jerusalem, it still appears to have been agitated in many Christian churches. Paul, in his Epistles to the Corinthians, Philippians, and Thessalonians, written at a much later period, combats precisely the very same errors. Nay, what would have been unnecessary if this determination had been inspired, or the opinion of twelve had been superior to that of one apostle, he never once refers to it as infallible and finally decisive, but exposes their fallacy by reasoning only. In fine, if there was a question here which concerned the world, there was an assembly convened, partly composed of men who were the ministers of all the Christian churches in the world. And if a General Assembly, or Œcumenic Council, judged in a matter of universal importance, may not the ministers of a number of different congregations meet like them, and judge authoritatively in matters which relate to all these congregations?

4thly, You alledge, that “it seems pretty obvious that  
 “when Paul speaks of going up to Jerusalem by revelation,  
 “Gal. ii. 2, he alludes to the journey he took upon this  
 “occasion; and this furnishes another striking peculiarity  
 “in the case before us.” In confirmation of this assertion, you refer us to a Note of M<sup>r</sup> Knight on the passage. The assertion which you here make, amounts to nothing more than a hypothesis, supported merely by an ingenious *conjecture* of a respectable commentator, which certainly must be acknowledged to be too feeble a foundation for so important a deduction. Something positive or explicit ought undoubtedly to be advanced before it can be allowed that this court was inspired. Besides, you are sensible that so high an authority as that of the celebrated Paley has ventured to call in question the hypothesis of M<sup>r</sup> Knight, and stated to it objections which have never yet been answered, and which cannot be overturned by the bare assertion of Mr. Ewing, “that he does not think them sufficiently conclusive.” “It  
 “may be doubted,” says he, “to what journey the words  
 “which open the second chapter of the Epistle, (that to  
 “the Galatians), *then fourteen years afterwards I went up*  
 “*unto Jerusalem*, relate. That which best corresponds  
 “with the date, and that to which most interpreters apply  
 “the passage, is the journey of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, when they went thither from Antioch, upon the  
 “business of the Gentile converts; and which journey produced the famous council and decree recorded in the fif-

“teenth chapter of the Acts. To me this opinion appears  
 “to be encumbered with strong objections. In the Epistle,  
 “Paul tells us that *he went up by revelation*, chap. ii.  
 “ver. 2. In the Acts, we read that he was sent by the  
 “church of Antioch, chap. xv. ver. 2. This is not very  
 “reconcilable. In the Epistle, St. Paul writes that when  
 “he came to Jerusalem, he communicated that gospel which  
 “he preached among the Gentiles, but privately, to them  
 “which were of reputation, chap. ii. ver. 2. If by that  
 “gospel he meant the immunity of the Gentile Christians  
 “from the Jewish law (and I know not what else it can  
 “mean), it is not easy to conceive how he should commu-  
 “nicate that privately, which was the subject of his public  
 “message. But a yet greater difficulty remains, viz. that  
 “in the account which the Epistle gives of what passed  
 “upon this visit at Jerusalem, no notice is taken of the de-  
 “liberation and decree which are recorded in the Acts, and  
 “which, according to that history, formed the business for  
 “the sake of which the journey was undertaken. The  
 “mention of the council and of its determination, whilst the  
 “apostle was relating his proceedings at Jerusalem, could  
 “hardly have been avoided, if in truth the narration belong  
 “to the same journey. To me it appears much more prob-  
 “able that Paul had taken some journey to Jerusalem, the  
 “mention of which is omitted in the Acts. Prior to the  
 “apostolic decree, we read that Paul and Barnabas abode  
 “at Antioch a long time with the disciples\*. Is it un-  
 “likely that during this long abode, they might go up to  
 “Jerusalem and return to Antioch? Or would the omis-  
 “sion of such a journey be unsuitable to the general brevity  
 “with which these memoirs are written, especially of those  
 “parts of St. Paul’s history which took place before the  
 “historian joined his society†?”

But admitting that this masterly reasoning could be over-  
 thrown, and that Paul, when he tells us that he went up by  
 revelation to Jerusalem, refers to his going up as a commis-  
 sioner from Antioch, what is to be inferred from this ex-  
 traordinary incident? That the assembly to which he was  
 to go, was to be actuated either by a miraculous influence,  
 or guided by a supernatural superintending energy? No,  
 assuredly. The degree of gifts possessed by this assembly

\* Acts xiv. 28.

† Horæ Paulinæ, p. 195.

for the decision of the question, and the manner in which they were to determine it, must be learned from other circumstances. Perhaps the court was to be divinely inspired, or perhaps it was to be directed only by common prudence, and the usual aids of the sacred Spirit—and the design of the Spirit in suggesting it to Paul to go up to Jerusalem, and to submit the cause to the apostles and elders, even as ordinary ministers, might be to point out to his church, in future times, a pattern for them to follow in difficult cases. None of these however can be deduced from the supernatural admonition of the Spirit, for this might have been given on either supposition. I maintain, therefore, that you are not entitled to infer, from this circumstance, that the assembly, to which the apostle was to refer the business, was either inspired, or infallibly directed; and that there is equal reason for believing that this business was submitted to a superior court, even of uninspired ministers, to exhibit a clear and satisfactory example of the manner in which important and difficult questions were thenceforth to be determined in the Christian church.

“Observe,” say you, 5thly, “the very peculiar circumstances in which the church at Jerusalem stood, from its being the seat of the residence of the apostles. To them was committed the important charge of teaching the disciples all things whatsoever they should observe. At this time it is very questionable, if any part of the New Testament scriptures was committed to writing. At any rate, we know that none of the Apostolic Epistles had yet any existence; far less were they collected as we have them now; for the benefit of Christians at large, and for their direction in any case of difficulty that might occur. This certainly placed the church at Jerusalem in a situation altogether peculiar. The apostles then occupied the room that the New Testament scriptures do now. It was as proper to consult them personally at that time, as it is for us now to have recourse to their writings to decide upon any point of New Testament worship. It is true, Paul was at Antioch, and he undoubtedly possessed inspiration and apostolic authority as well as the rest. But, on that occasion, the persons who taught that doctrine respecting the necessity of circumcision came from Judea, the seat of the rest of the apostles. It is pretty apparent from ver. 24, that these persons represented them as fa-

“vouring their views. In this situation, Paul must have had an authority at least paramount to his own alleged in opposition to it. Nothing in this case could give such perfect satisfaction, as the united decision of the apostles when assembled together.”

It is readily conceded, that the church of Jerusalem stood, at that period, in very peculiar circumstances, but not so peculiar as you would insinuate. Though the New Testament scriptures were not then completed, and though many references were made to the *ap stles* who resided at Jerusalem, as to matters of doctrine, I must again tell you, that I cannot see why you affirm that they were made also to the whole of the Christians who dwelt at Jerusalem. If these references required inspiration for their determination, most of the Christians at Jerusalem could no more decide upon them than the churches from which they came. And if they did not require it, and yet were settled by authoritative sentences from the apostles, the common members at Jerusalem had no more right to pass them upon *other* churches than the members at Corinth, or Ephesus, or Rome had. Let it be allowed then, that the apostles, till the New Testament was completed, were usually referred to, while they remained at Jerusalem, as the final arbiters of religious controversies—what follows? That, when they delivered these decisions, they were *always* inspired? Such a conclusion would be a *begging of the question*, or a taking for granted what neither you nor any other mortal can prove. It would be saying that God never suffered them occasionally to ascertain his mind from the Old-Testament scriptures, and from any miraculous works which he had previously performed, but guided them always by a supernatural influence, which is too presumptuous, I should think, for any imperfect creature to affirm. It is safer to determine this point by the fact, as related in scripture, than, with the Aristotelians of old, to lay down a *hypothesis*, or supposition of our own, and, *taking it for granted*, endeavour to accommodate to it this particular fact. Attending then to this fact, and to what is recorded of it, I must once more declare, that however the apostles acted in *other* references, when they supplied the place of the New Testament scriptures, they do not appear to have acted by inspiration in the present instance. The decision which they pronounced, seems to have been the fruit of their examination of the Old-Testament scriptures,



and attention to some former miracles which had been wrought, and not of any supernatural suggestion. At the same time, it is granted that in other instances where inspiration was necessary, they would act under its influence, and be guided by its dictates. Your attempt to shew that if inspiration had been requisite, Paul was not sufficient to have determined the controversy, was considered in the preceding Letter.

Your last, however, is your favourite argument, for you say, p. 41. "What has always appeared to me the most decisive proof that this passage affords no countenance to modern Presbytery, arises from the issue of the decision the church at Jerusalem pronounced, on the question that was laid before them. They not only send their decision to Antioch, but to Syria and Cilicia, ver. 23; and we learn from chap. xvi. ver. 4, when Paul and Silas went out on Paul's second journey, they delivered in the different cities the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. Here, those who support Presbytery from this passage, seem inextricably involved in a dilemma. It must be allowed these decrees were either binding or not. If they were not, then the whole was merely an application for advice, and the passage has no connection with Presbyterian authority. If they were not binding, then it follows that the church at Jerusalem ordained decrees which were obligatory not only on the church at Antioch, but on every other church in the Christian world, though they had not the shadow of a representative in that meeting where the decrees were formed. Surely this puts it beyond the possibility of a doubt that the case was an extraordinary one, and consequently forms no precedent for other churches. If it was not extraordinary, let us see to what it will lead. It ought then to be imitated; that is, one church should frame decrees to which it is entitled to require obedience from every other church in the Christian world. What church is entitled to claim such a prerogative?—But it is unnecessary to pursue the argument farther, as the inference implies what is impracticable and absurd."

To the formidable argument founded on this dilemma I would briefly state, that, I apprehend, Presbyterians may safely grant that an authoritative power was exercised by this assembly, and yet none of your momentous consequen-

ces will follow. What though its decrees were binding upon Syria, and Cilicia, and Lystra, and Iconium, as well as Antioch, will it ever be proved from this, that they were the dictate of inspiration? No, verily. Were there not apostles in this council, as has been already said, who, acting even in their uninspired capacity, were universal pastors, and had a right to ordain decrees which were binding upon all the churches on earth, as well as to preach to all of them, as ordinary ministers, according as opportunity offered? How, of course, can it be demonstrated from the universally obligatory power of the decrees that they must have been supernaturally suggested, when the apostles, who were members of the assembly which passed them, even as *uninspired ministers*, had a right to deliver them not only to these, but to all other churches? Neither, then, from this, nor any other circumstance, does it appear that the decision which was pronounced by this council was an inspired decision, or that the members of it were guided by any superior influence than their own judgment and prudence, and the common aids of the sacred Spirit.

Is it said, that no power properly juridical was assumed by this assembly, and that therefore no precedent can be pleaded from it for the power of modern courts of review? It is replied, that the power of determining what was to be preached as the means of salvation was claimed by it, than which, undoubtedly, none can be considered as a higher or more important exercise of authority. Their determination, moreover, as has been noticed, is called a decree, and the very fact of their passing such a decree, implied in them the power also of punishing all who refused to submit to it. But if this is not to be considered as ecclesiastical power, I know not what is entitled to the name.

Thus, I conceive, the three general positions have in some measure been established. *First*, That there was a court at Jerusalem of Christian ministers, who sat and determined in a reference which was made to them from another court at Antioch: *Secondly*, That this court at Jerusalem delivered not merely to that at Antioch a general advice, but an authoritative decision: *And thirdly*, That, in this decision, they seem neither to have been directed by miraculous suggestion nor extraordinary superintendence, but by the usual aids of the sacred Spirit, which are common to faithful ministers in every age.

If this however was the case, and a court at Antioch was subject to the review of a court at Jerusalem, is it not a clear and sufficient warrant for those courts of review which exist among Presbyterians? It must certainly be of little importance to object that this court at Jerusalem did not resemble a Presbytery or Synod, since it was unquestionably composed of ministers of Christ acting in an ordinary and common capacity, and different from those from whom the reference was presented. This, I presume, is the grand point in dispute; and since it is established, it authorizes, I apprehend, courts of review to any extent that the circumstances of the church may be found to require. If *the principle* of the subordination of courts be demonstrated, it is evident that for the same reason that it is proper to subject the rulers of a particular congregation to the review of a Presbytery, if the decision of the Presbytery is not satisfactory, it is lawful and desirable to refer it to the determination of a greater number of ministers, met as a Synod, or to a still greater number, as an Assembly.

With regard to the sentiments of the primitive church, a diversity of opinions has existed. Mr. Ewing has quoted, in proof of their Independency, an unsubstantiated assertion of Mosheim, without a single document to confirm it\*. In opposition to this, however, were we to abide merely by the reports of the learned, it might be sufficient, on this point, to refer Independents to the authority of Lord King, whom they so much commend, and who, in his *Inquiry into the Constitution of the Primitive Church*, part i. chap. viii, has not merely, like Mosheim, asserted, but fully proved, that courts of review, in the early ages, were common in the church. Many others also might be mentioned as of similar sentiments. Few instances indeed can be adduced of Presbyteries or Synods before the time of Cyprian. But for this a very satisfactory reason can be assigned. Most of the writings of the fathers, before that period, are lost; and in the few which remain, the only hints which are delivered respecting the government of the church are entirely incidental. "The reason," says King, p. 148, "why we find not more *Synodical decrees* of the three first centuries, comes not, from that they judicially determined none, or required not the observance of them; but from that,

\* See Appendix to his Lecture, p. 92.

“ either they were not careful, or the fury and violence of  
 “ the times would not permit them, to transmit them down  
 “ to their successors ; or through the length of time they  
 “ are lost, and scarce any thing besides the names of such  
 “ Synods are now remembered, and of multitudes, neither  
 “ names nor decrees are to be found. But yet there is  
 “ enough escaped the fury of persecution, and the length of  
 “ time, to convince that those Synods did decree those  
 “ things which they judged expedient for the polity, discip-  
 “ line, and government of those particular churches that  
 “ were within their respective provinces, and required them  
 “ to be observed by all the members thereof.” Besides, as,  
 on a former part of the subject, it was shewn that Independ-  
 ents have never been able to adduce any plausible proof, of  
 the right of the people at large to judge and vote in church-  
 business, from the writings of the fathers prior to the time  
 of Cyprian ; how can they object to quotations from this  
 their favourite author, which Presbyterians bring forward,  
 to prove the subordination of judicatories in ecclesiastical  
 government ?

In reviewing the writings of the fathers, we find that  
 they acknowledge that such courts of review existed in the  
 church from the earliest period. Cyprian, for instance, in his  
 Sixty-sixth Epistle, written, according to the calculation of  
 Marshall, A. D. 249, not only speaks of a Synod and its  
 authoritative decrees, but represents these as having obtained  
 among his more ancient predecessors. “ *Graviter commoti*  
 “ *sumus ego et collegæ mei qui præsentés aderant, et com-*  
 “ *presbyteri nostri qui nobis assidebant, fratres carissimi,*  
 “ *cum cognovissemus quod Geminus Victor, frater nos-*  
 “ *ter, de seculo excedens, Geminium Faustinum presby-*  
 “ *terum tutorem testamento suo nominaverit, cum jam pri-*  
 “ *dem in concilio episcoporum statutum sit, ne quis de*  
 “ *clericis et Dei ministris tutorem vel curatorem testamen-*  
 “ *to suo constituat :*” *i. e.* “ It was a great concern to me  
 “ and to my colleagues who happened to be present with  
 “ with me, and to our fellow-presbyters who sat in judg-  
 “ ment along with us, when we learned that our brother  
 “ Geminus Victor, at his death, had appointed Geminus  
 “ Faustinus a presbyter, executor of his will, since it hath  
 “ long ago been determined in a Council or Synod of bishops,  
 “ that no one should nominate in his will, a clergyman,  
 “ or a minister of God, to be an executor, or a guardian.”  
 And again, as a proof that this Synod was not merely cou-

sultative, after making some observations upon the necessity of requiring the ministers of the church to devote themselves entirely to their sacred function, he adds, “ Quod episcopi antecessores nostri religiose considerantes, et salubriter providentes, censuerunt ne quis frater excedens ad tutelam vel curam clericum nominaret ; ac si qui hoc faceret, non offerretur pro eo, nec sacrificium pro dormitione ejus celebraretur, neque enim apud altare Dei nominari meretur in sacerdotum prece, qui ab altari sacerdotes et ministros voluit avocare. Et ideo Victor cum contra formam nuper in concilio a sacerdotibus datam, Geminium Faustinum presbyterum ausus sit tutorem constituere, non est quod pro dormitione ejus apud vos fiat oblatio, aut deprecatio aliqua nomine ejus in ecclesiæ frequentetur, ut sacerdotum decretum religiose et necessarie factum servetur a nobis simul et cæteris fratribus detur exemplum, ne quis sacerdotes et ministros Dei, altari ejus, et ecclesiæ vacantes ad seculares molestias devocet.” That is, “ Which the bishops, our predecessors, religiously considering, decreed that no brother, at his death, should name a clergyman executor to his will ; and if any one should do so, there should be no offering for him, nor sacrifice presented for his repose, for he who would call off from the altar its priests and ministers, does not deserve to be mentioned in the prayers of the priest at the altar. Wherefore since Victor, against the canon which was lately delivered upon this occasion in a council of bishops, has presumed to appoint Geminus Faustinus, a presbyter, his executor, there is no reason why an oblation should be offered for his repose, nor the customary prayers of the church presented on his behalf, both that this *Synodical decree* may be observed by us, and an example may be given to the rest of our brethren, that no person may call to a secular employment the priests and ministers of God, whose whole time and care should be devoted to his altar.”

Another of these authoritative Synods or Councils is mentioned by Cyprian, in a passage formerly quoted from his Sixty-seventh Epistle. Speaking of Novatian, he says, “ Et cum ad nos in Africam legatos misisset, optans ad communicationem nostram admitti, hinc a concilio plurimorum sacerdotum qui præsentibus eramus sententiam retulerit, se foris esse cœpisse, nec posse a quoquam nostrum sibi communicari,” &c. : i. e. “ And when he had sent his



“ messengers to us in Africa, desiring to be admitted to our  
 “ communion, he received this sentence *from a Council* of  
 “ many ministers who were then assembled, that he had be-  
 “ gun the rupture, and could not be admitted by any of us  
 “ to our communion.” Here we see a Council or Synod,  
 of *many minitsters*, exercising an authoritative power over  
 all the churches to which they belonged, and decreeing that  
 this man should not be received into their communion. And  
 again, in the same Epistle, talking of wicked and arrogant  
 men, he says, “ Ex quibus cum Marcianus esse cœperit, et  
 “ se Novatiano conjungens, adversarius misericordiæ et pie-  
 “ tatis extiterit : sententiam non dicat, sed accipiat, nec sic  
 “ agat, quasi ipse judicaverit *de collegio sacerdotum*, quan-  
 “ do ipse sit ab universis sacerdotibus judicatus :” *i. e.*  
 “ Since Marcian hath begun to be one of these, and joining  
 “ himself to Novatian, hath proved himself to be an enemy  
 “ to mercy and piety, let him not pretend to pronounce any  
 “ sentence, but let him receive it ; nor let him behave like  
 “ one who is to judge *the whole college of bishops*, since he  
 “ himself has been judged by all of them.” Here he speaks  
 of a whole college of pastors as pronouncing sentence of ex-  
 communication upon a heretic ; and if we attend to another  
 passage in this Epistle, we shall see that the college includ-  
 ed the ministers of many churches. “ Therefore,” says he,  
 “ dear brother, *the very numerous body* of ministers is so  
 “ united, that if any of our college become heretical, the  
 “ rest assist, and, like good and compassionate shepherds,  
 “ gather the sheep of the Lord into his fold.” “ Idcirco  
 “ enim, frater carissime, *copiosum corpus est sacerdotium*  
 “ concordix mutux glutino atque unitatis vinculo copulatum  
 “ ut si ex collegio nostro hæresin facere,” &c.

In his Fifty-ninth Epistle likewise, addressed to Fidus,  
 and subscribed by Cyprian, and sixty-six ministers who had  
 sat in council with him, he speaks of a decree which they  
 had made, and which was considered as binding by all the  
 churches to which they belonged. And at the same time  
 they find fault with one Therapius, because, in opposition  
 to their decree, he had rashly restored to the communion of  
 the church, Victor, a presbyter, before he had exhibited  
 sufficient evidences of penitence ; and say, that though they  
 might have inflicted upon Therapius a higher punishment,  
 they would content themselves with a reproof and admoni-  
 tion. “ Legimus (says Cyprian to Fidus), *literas tuas,*

“ frater carissime, quibus significasti de Victore quodam  
 “ presbytero, quod ei, antequam pœnitentiam plenam egis-  
 “ set, et Domino Deo, in quem deliquerat, satisfecisset,  
 “ temere Therapius collega noster immaturo tempore et  
 “ præpropere festinatione pacem dederit. Quæ res nos sa-  
 “ tis movit, recessum esse a decreti nostri auctoritate, ut  
 “ ante legitimum, et plenum tempus satisfactionis, pax ei  
 “ concederetur. Sed librato apud nos diu consilio, *satis*  
 “ fuit objurgare Therapium collegam nostrum, quod temere  
 “ hoc fecerit, et instruxisse, ne quid tale de cætero faciat.”  
 That is, “ We have perused your Letter, dearest brother,  
 “ wherein you intimate to us the case of Victor, once a  
 “ presbyter, whom our colleague Therapius rashly admit-  
 “ ted before he had exhibited sufficient marks of penitence,  
 “ and made satisfaction to that God against whom he had  
 “ offended. Which circumstance troubled us not a little,  
 “ because, overlooking *the authority of our decree*, he had  
 “ been restored to communion before the lawful term of sa-  
 “ tisfaction had expired. But having long and fully consi-  
 “ dered the matter, we resolved *to content ourselves* with  
 “ reprimanding our colleague Therapius for his precipitate  
 “ conduct, and with admonishing him to guard against such  
 “ measures for the future.”

This same council, moreover, which had thus authorita-  
 tively determined respecting the time during which offenders  
 should be suspended from the communion of the church be-  
 fore they were re-admitted, pronounces, at the same time, a  
 decision respecting the time at which infants should be baptiz-  
 ed. “ Quantum vero (says Cyprian) ad causam infantium  
 “ pertinet, quos dixisti intra secundum vel tertium diem,  
 “ quo nati sunt, constitutos baptizari non oportere, et con-  
 “ siderandum esse legem circumcisionis antiquæ, ut intra oc-  
 “ tavum diem cum qui natus est baptizandum et sacrifican-  
 “ dum non putares; longe aliud in concilio nostro omnibus  
 “ visum est. - In hoc enim quod tu putabas esse faciendum,  
 “ nemo consensit, sed universi potius judicavimus nulli ho-  
 “ minum nato misericordiam Dei et gratiam denegandam.”  
 That is, “ Now, as to the case of new-born infants, who  
 “ should not, according to your opinion, be baptized with-  
 “ in the second or third day after their birth, but should ra-  
 “ ther wait the time appointed by the law for circumcision,  
 “ and so not be baptised or devoted to the service of God  
 “ till the *eighth* day, I must tell you that we are all here

“ assembled in council, of another mind ; and no one of us  
 “ came into your sentiments ; but on the contrary, we all  
 “ concluded that the grace and mercies of God were to be de-  
 “ nied to none who should come into the world \*.” And  
 afterwards they express, if possible in still stronger terms,  
 their conviction that this ordinance should be administered  
 to infants at any period. This determination, however, ap-  
 pears to be as authoritative as their former decision, as to the  
 case of the lapsed, and seems to have been equally binding  
 upon all their churches.

Firmilian, bishop of Cesarea in Cappadocia, in the La-  
 tin translation of his Letter, which Cyprian has given us  
 among his own Epistles, affirms that such Councils or Sy-  
 nods were common also at that time in the province of Les-  
 ser Asia. After telling us, as was before mentioned, that el-  
 ders alone preside in the church, and baptize and ordain,  
 and that heretics are not entitled to perform these functions  
 after they apostatize, he adds, “ *Quod totum nos jampridem*  
 “ *in Iconio, qui Phrygiæ locus est, collecti in unum con-*  
 “ *venientibus ex Galatia, et Cilicia, et cæteris proxime*  
 “ *regionibus confirmavimus, tenendum contra hæreticos fir-*  
 “ *miter et vindicandum :*” *i. e.* “ All which many of us,

\* “ The unanimity” (says Marshall, in his Notes upon Cyprian,  
 which I have just now seen) “ wherewith this question was carried  
 “ at this early period of the church), shews that infant-baptism,  
 “ even at this time, was no novel usage: there was no manner of  
 “ dispute, whether infants should be baptised; but whether be-  
 “ fore the *eighth* day or not; to which the unanimous resolution  
 “ was, that the grace of God should be denied to *none*.” It is hop-  
 ed that the reader, for the sake of the observation, will pardon the  
 little digression contained in this note. And it is trusted that those  
 who are desirous of ascertaining the truth upon this subject, and  
 have not an opportunity of perusing the more laborious Treatises  
 of Wall and Williams, will not be displeased with the author, if he  
 recommend to their attention, at least in support of infant-baptism,  
 the very ingenious pamphlet of Peter Edwards, who, for eleven  
 years, was an Antipedobaptist minister, but renounced that con-  
 nection; the Dissertation of Pirie, and his Defence of that Disser-  
 tation; the manly reasoning of the late venerable Dr. Erskine, in  
 his Sermon upon that subject, in the second volume of his Dis-  
 courses; and Three Sermons upon Baptism, by Dr. Lathrop of  
 America, which, while they are peculiarly adapted, from their  
 admirable perspicuity, to the plainest readers, from the solidity of  
 reasoning and acuteness of judgment which they discover, are wor-  
 thy of the perusal of the most enlightened. These Discourses have  
 lately been republished in Scotland, and sell for a trifle.

“ assembled together in Iconium, a city of Phrygia, from  
 “ Galatia, Cilicia, and the neighbouring regions, determined  
 “ to maintain and assert against the pretensions of heretics\*.”  
 And in another part of the same Epistle he informs us, that  
 they had at least an annual meeting of this authoritative  
 Synod or Council. “ Qua ex causa (says he) necessario  
 “ apud nos fit, ut *per singulos annos* seniores et præpositi  
 “ in unum conveniamus ad disponenda ea quæ curæ nostræ  
 “ commissa sunt :” *i. e.* “ Wherefore we find it necessary  
 “ that our elders and rulers assemble every year, for settling  
 “ those things which are committed to our care.” Epist. lxxv.  
 In fine, omitting the accounts of many other Synods,  
 which might easily be produced from the writings of Cyprian,  
 we are informed by Eusebius, in his Ecclesiastical History,  
 book vii. chap. xxix, that, in the reign of Aurelian, a Synod  
 of many ministers met at Antioch, and excommunicated Paul  
 of Samosatena from their different churches. “ Καθ’ ὃν  
 “ (says he) τελευταίας συγκροτηθείσης πλειων ὄσων επισκοπων  
 “ συνόδου, Φωσθεις και προς ἁπαντων ἡδὴ σαφως καταγνωσθεις  
 “ ετεροδοξίαν ὅτις κατα αντιοχείαν ἀιρεσιως αρχηλος της ὑπο τον  
 “ ουρανον καθολικης εκκλησιας αποκηρυττεται.” And in this  
 Synod we are told, in the preceding chapter, that there were,  
 among others, Firmilian, bishop of Cæsarea, now mention-  
 ed ; Gregory and Athenodorus, brothers, pastors of churches  
 in Pontus ; Helenus, minister of the church at Tarsis ; and  
 Nicomas, minister of the church in Iconium : with Hyme-  
 neus, bishop of Jerusalem ; Theotecnus, bishop of Cesarea  
 in Palestine, near Jerusalem ; and Maximus, bishop of Bos-  
 tra. Thus, then, it appears that authoritative courts, supe-  
 rior to the governors of a particular congregation, are not  
 only clearly authorized by reason as necessary and useful,  
 and sanctioned by scripture as divinely appointed, but existed  
 even in the earliest period of the Christian church ; and con-  
 sequently that the scheme for which Independents contend  
 is not less contrary to the representations of antiquity, than  
 it seems to be to reason and scripture.

\* “ Dionysius of Alexandria,” says Marshall, “ in his Third  
 “ Epistle on Baptism, as represented to us by Eusebius, book vii.  
 “ chap. 7, tells Philemon, to whom he wrote, that the Africans  
 “ were not the first introducers of baptizing heretics ; but that the  
 “ bishops, assembled at *Iconium* and Synnada, had long before de-  
 “ termined the question”—which, too, proves that this council was  
 authoritative.

I have now finished what I intended when I began these Letters—a Vindication of the Presbyterian plan of church-government. That I have refuted all the arguments or objections of Independents I do not pretend, for as each of their congregations is unconnected with the rest in point of administration, there may be *as many ecclesiastical constitutions*, and *as many diversities of sentiment* with regard to government among them, as there are congregations. But who would profess to detail or examine the whole of these systems? Besides, as it is another of the principles of most of our modern Independents, that written confessions, exhibiting their view of the meaning of scripture, are unlawful, it is extremely difficult to ascertain the tenets even of a few of them, on this, or any other point of doctrine. This principle certainly has its own advantages, and must be particularly suitable to the plan of those who are frequently changing their religious sentiments. It is extremely disadvantageous however to the public at large, who can have no certain way of discovering their tenets, while, in another point of view, it is no less injurious to themselves, as it frequently obliges the most impartial inquirers to commit involuntary mistakes in attempting to state their principles. If, in the preceding pages therefore, there be any mistakes with regard to the sentiments of Independents, it is again requested that they may not be ascribed to a design wilfully to distort or misrepresent them. Against this, as far as the author was aware, he has endeavoured to guard, and he should be sorry indeed, if, in the view which he has delivered of any doctrine or argument, he had yielded to its influence in the slightest degree. And conscious as he is that he has attempted, as far as he could ascertain the truth respecting their principles, to know and to state it, if, in any instance, he has erred, he must beg leave, without any intention invidiously to sneer at this particular principle, to set it down to the account of their wanting any public and written confession—a peculiarity however which may be followed, at least in the conviction of Independents, with advantages which will more than compensate such evils.



## APPENDIX I.

ON THE

### JEWISH SYNAGOGUES AND SANHEDRIN.

TO the argument from the constitution and proceedings of the Jewish Synagogue and Sanhedrin, illustrated in Letter VI. it has been objected that they were merely human inventions, not introduced till after the Babylonish captivity, and therefore could not be designed as a pattern to Christian churches. That they were introduced only at this period, is a point which has been warmly, and with considerable plausibility, contested by many distinguished ecclesiastical writers of antiquity.

It is highly probable, however, that synagogues, to a certain degree, were coeval with the settlement of the Israelites in Judea. It was the office of many of the Levites, who were exempted from agriculture and other secular employments, and were dispersed through the various districts of the land, not only to offer sacrifices, but to instruct the people in the truths of religion; for this maxim is mentioned by Malachi, chap. ii. 7, as established in every age of their church, that “the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and “they should seek the law at his mouth; for he was the “messenger of the Lord of hosts.” But how could they so conveniently communicate this instruction as by collecting the people into synagogues or assemblies? It would seem also, that without some such convocation or assembly, from the very beginning, the Sabbath could not have been observed by them; for it is expressly said, Lev. xxiii. 3, that the Sabbath was to the Israelites a holy convocation, or for a holy convocation, in or among all their dwellings. If no such convocation was observed then, throughout the whole nation, till after the captivity, there was no public worship except at Jerusalem—a circumstance which must appear highly extraordinary, when we reflect that they were the

only visible church of God in existence at that period. Nor will it be easy to account for the following description of the ravages of the enemies of the Jews, probably at the time of the captivity : “ They have destroyed all the synagogues of God in the land,” כל מועדי אל בארץ, Psal lxxiv. 8, where, says a respectable critic, not only מועדי from עזר, *convenire fecit ad locum tempusque statutum*, is properly translated synagogues, in which the people were statedly to meet for religious worship, but the words כל and בארץ, *all the synagogues—in the land*, being added, prevent us from explaining this expression, as some do, only of the temple, and holy places belonging to it, at Jerusalem.

Farther, as synagogues, however they might be altered after the captivity, appear to have existed many ages before ; so, the sanhedrin, or court of seventy elders, though it also might be altered at this period, was most probably of much earlier origin. The learned Selden says, that nothing is more certain from the sacred scripture, than that it was instituted *the-second* year after the children of Israel came out of Egypt. “ Ita nihil certius est quam eam, ut e scriptura “ diximus, anno exitus secundo tribuendam\*.” He quotes also Archbishop Usher, Capellus, Perkins, Temporarius, Codomannus, Scaliger, Helvicus, Calvisius, Buntingius, Massæus, and many others of the most distinguished ecclesiastical antiquaries, as attributing to it an origin nearly similar. Lightfoot likewise, with Grotius, Lowman, and many of the most illustrious names in Biblical literature, might here be adduced as of this opinion, together with a long list of Jewish doctors, as appears from their Talmuds.

The institution of this court seems plainly to be pointed out in Numb. xi. 16, 17. “ And the Lord said unto Moses, “ Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom “ thou knowest to be elders of the people, and officers over “ them ; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. And I will “ come down, and talk with thee there : and I will take of “ the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them ; “ and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, “ that thou bear it not thyself alone.” “ The general design of the institution of these seventy,” says the judicious Lowman, “ was, as is here said, that *they might bear*

\* Selden de Synedriis Hebræorum, p. 631.

“ *the burden along with Moses*, that he might not bear it  
“ alone. This sure cannot be meant of the common and or-  
“ dinary administration of justice, which had been provided  
“ for just before in the Jethronian præfectures. As far then  
“ as they were to assist Moses in matters judiciary, it could  
“ only be in those greater matters, which, as reserved causes,  
“ were to be brought before Moses ; or such difficult ques-  
“ tions as were referred by appeal from the inferior judges.  
“ In this sense, this court of the seventy elders will be a  
“ constitution not much unlike the (ancient) parliament of  
“ Paris, so far as that was a court of law. But this was  
“ not the only end for which this court was instituted. The  
“ immediate occasion of its institution was the complaint of  
“ Moses on the murmuring and sedition of the people and  
“ the displeasure of God ; that fire was sent to consume them  
“ that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. It is in  
“ answer to this complaint of Moses on this occasion, that  
“ the Lord said, *Gather unto me seventy men of the elders*  
“ *of Israel—that they may stand with thee : and they shall*  
“ *bear the burden of the people with thee*, that thou bear it  
“ not thyself alone. We see plainly that these seventy were  
“ to be co-adjutors to Moses in his councils, how to answer  
“ the people’s complaints, and to advise what would be best  
“ to do on all occasions, especially of greater difficulty ; to  
“ preserve peace and good order among the people, and to  
“ prevent those mutinies which would likely prove fatal to  
“ the whole nation, if not remedied by some means or other.  
“ In this view,” he adds, “ the seventy elders will appear  
“ to be designed not only as a standing court of law and  
“ equity to assist Moses as judge in causes of greater con-  
“ sequence, and in appeals, but to assist the judge with their  
“ advice upon every occasion ; this was properly to bear the  
“ burden of the people with Moses, that he might not bear  
“ it himself alone. For now the judge would not bear all  
“ the envy or ill-will of the people when dissatisfied or un-  
“ easy with any part of the administration, for the common  
“ people, though they know very little of the reasons of any  
“ administration, are yet apt to think every thing wrong  
“ that does not please them, or which is attended with diffi-  
“ culties to themselves or the public. Now a council of  
“ seventy persons, of the most approved wisdom and inte-  
“ grity, would at least share this burden among them all,  
“ instead of throwing the whole on one man. And it would

“ be moreover an ease to the judge’s own mind, and make  
 “ him more resolved in any council to be taken or executed,  
 “ when it should be with the advice and approbation of a  
 “ multitude of counsellors, in which there is wisdom and  
 “ safety. And, finally, it was proper to give authority and  
 “ respect to such orders as should be made by advice of  
 “ persons whom the people themselves had approved and  
 “ chosen as eminent for their wisdom and integrity. Con-  
 “ sider then this court as a standing senate always at hand,  
 “ or as a constant privy-council to the judge, and we have  
 “ a most wise provision for the easier and better government  
 “ of the whole nation; and this will make a considerable  
 “ part of the states-general of the united tribes\*.”

In this rational and masterly account then of the seventy, we have not only an excellent view of the end of their institution, but a very satisfactory proof of the necessity of their continuance in every subsequent age. If such co-adjutors were necessary to Moses for the ends here specified, much more to the judges and kings who succeeded him, of whom none surpassed, and but few equalled him in knowledge and sagacity. In this account too, as well as in the representations of scripture, we have a complete refutation of the assertion of Vitringa†, that the seventy were intended not to judge, but merely to be witnesses and inspectors of the actions of Moses, and, in this manner, prevent any odium which he might incur from any part of his work. “ Nonne  
 “ hoc commodissime ita intelligitur, ut Mosen liberarent  
 “ magna invidiæ parte, suaque illa pluralitate, uti propiores  
 “ actionum Mosis testes illius modi murmuraciones populi  
 “ impedirent aut compescerent? What need was there that the Lord *should take of the Spirit*, and give it to them for this purpose, if they were only designed to be witnesses of his conduct? or could their performing the part of witnesses amount to the full import of that very energetic expression, of *bearing the burden of the people* along with him?

That this court might sometimes be discontinued during the laxer periods of the Jewish government is indeed probable. It would be too much however, from this, to suppose that it totally ceased after the days of Moses. There seems to be a strong allusion to it in Deut. xvii. 8, 9, 10. “ If

\* Lowman’s Civil Government of the Hebrews, p. 169.

† See his Dissert. de Syned. Hebræor. p. 569.

“ there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between  
 “ blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between  
 “ stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within  
 “ thy gates ; then shalt thou arise, and get thee up unto the  
 “ place which the Lord thy God shall choose ; and thou  
 “ shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and to the judge  
 “ that shall be in those days, and inquire ; and they shall  
 “ shew thee the sentence of judgment. And thou shalt do  
 “ according to the sentence which they of that place (which  
 “ the Lord shall choose) shall shew thee, and thou shalt  
 “ observe to do according to all that they inform thee,” &c.  
 Now, that the priests and judge, here mentioned, could not  
 be, as Vitranga supposes, only ordinary priests and judges;  
 or single persons, is probable from this, that though priests  
 and Levites resided in every city, they were not competent  
 to give the decision required ; but the people, in whatever  
 part of the land they lived, were to come up to Jerusalem,  
 and strictly submit to the determinations of the priests and  
 judge there, under pain of the most dreadful penalties : ver.  
 11, 12. But if the priests and Levites competent to decide  
 on these matters, were to be found at Jerusalem only, they  
 must certainly have been invested with extraordinary powers ;  
 and when we attend to what was before stated, it seems most  
 likely that they were no other than the seventy elders, with  
 the priest or judge who was their president. This court;  
 in fine, though discontinued for a season, prior to the reign  
 of Jehoshaphat, seems to have been revived by this prince ;  
 who describes the object for which it was instituted, in  
 almost the very terms used in Deuteronomy. By this court;  
 also, Jeremiah was probably tried and acquitted : Jer. xxvi.

It is certainly not conclusive to argue, that because the  
 court of the seventy is not mentioned by that particular  
 name after the days of Moses, it must have ceased with him.  
 It might as well be alleged, that though, from its being af-  
 firmed that in Christ there is neither male nor female, women  
 may be admitted to the Lord's supper, yet as there is no ac-  
 count in the New Testament of a woman partaking of this  
 ordinance, no woman partook of it in the primitive church.  
 It will be said, perhaps, that the writings of the early fathers  
 bear testimony to this fact. But Josephus, Philo, and Mai-  
 monides, who may properly be denominated the Jewish  
 Fathers, no less fully attest the existence of this court. Or  
 is it contended that such a court was certainly not in use in



the days of the judges, because it is said, Judges xxi. 25, that "because in those days there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes?" We reply, that this court, according to the opinion of the accurate Lowman, being designed only for the decision of higher matters, and more difficult and interesting controversies, was not properly concerned with the common administration of the laws of justice; and that it might with more propriety be asserted that they had no judges at that time in the gates of their cities, to whom this belonged as their peculiar care, than that they had no sanhedrin, which was not immediately concerned in these matters. Yet we know from Deut. xvi. 18, that such judges were to be appointed by the Israelites, after their settlement in Canaan, in every city, and such judges also we have reason to believe they had at this very period.

We thus see that the synagogue and sanhedrin are not to be accounted mere human inventions. But even though it were granted that they were not introduced till after the Babylonish captivity, it seems still to follow that if they were not founded upon a direct divine commandment, they were at least indirectly warranted and encouraged by the divine word. The institution of synagogues was designed for improving the people in the knowledge of the law, and was a fulfilment of the divine injunction, that since the priest's lips were to keep knowledge, they were to seek the law at his mouth. Besides which, as is proved in the preceding Letters, it received the approbation of Jesus himself. And with regard to the sanhedrin, it was evidently founded on the commandment of God to the Israelites, (Deut. xvi. 18), "to make to themselves judges and officers in all the gates of their cities, which the Lord their God gave them throughout their tribes;" a commandment which appears to have authorized them not only to appoint as many judges in their particular cities as they found to be necessary, but also to establish a *superior* court of judges in their chief city, by which the sentences of the inferior courts might be reviewed, and judgment pronounced in matters of peculiar difficulty or importance.

Do Independents farther assert, that these were not ecclesiastical, but only civil courts, and, of course, that we are not entitled to argue from the government which obtained in them, to that which is to exist in the Christian church? It

is replied, that the synagogue being designed for the religious instruction of the people, and its privileges and punishments being spiritual, (in so far as the Jewish œconomy admitted of this), it must have been principally, if not entirely, an ecclesiastical institution. The reason why the blind man (John ix:) was cast out of the synagogue, viz. his profession of faith in Christ, was purely ecclesiastical: and our Saviour himself tells his disciples, that the same punishment would be inflicted on them for a similar fault. Nor is it less plain that the sanhedrin, though it was empowered to take cognizance of civil, was appointed also to judge of ecclesiastical matters. Those who appealed to it, were required to hearken to the priest as well as to the judge, Deut. xvii; and when revived by Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. xix, it was authorized to determine *in the matters of the Lord* as well as in the king's matters. The account likewise of the manner in which excommunication was performed by them in a particular instance, as recorded in Pirke Rabb. Elieser, cap. xxxviii, shews that this ceremony, though attended sometimes with the privation of civil rights, was also an ecclesiastical punishment. "Ezra, Zerobabel, and Joshua," say the Jews, "assembled the whole congregation in the temple of the Lord; and they brought three hundred priests, three hundred trumpets, and three hundred books of the law, and as many boys; and they sounded their trumpets; and the Levites, singing, cursed the Samaritans in the mystery of the name Jehovah, and in the decalogue, and with the curse of the superior house of judgment, and likewise with the curse of the inferior house of judgment; that no Israelite should eat the bread of the Samaritans, that no proselyte should be received from them, and that they should have no part *in the resurrection of the dead.*" Quid tum fecerunt Ezra, Zerobabel et Jehoshua? Congregaverunt totam ecclesiam seu cætum populi in templum Domini et introduxerunt trecentos sacerdotes, et trecentos adolescentes (seu discipulos minores) quibus erant in manibus trecentæ buccinæ, et trecenti libri legis. Hi clangebant; Levitæ autem cantabant et psallebant; et excommunicabant Cuthæos per mysterium nominis Tetragrammati, et per scripturam descriptam in tabulis legis, et per anathema fori superioris seu cœlestis, et per anathema fori inferioris seu terrestres, ita ut nemo Israelitarum unquam in posterum comederet buccellam aliquam Cuthæorum.

“ Hinc dicunt quicumque comedit carnem Cuthæi, is vescitur  
 “ quasi carne porcina Cuthæus quoque ne fieret proselytus,  
 “ neque haberet partem in resurrectione mortuorum, juxta  
 “ illud quod scriptum est, *Non ad vos simul nobiscum attinet*  
 “ *instauratio domus Dei nostri*; neque in hoc neque in  
 “ futuro seculo.” Buxtorf, too, explains the ejection from  
 their synagogues to be a casting out from their holy assemblies,  
 and as corresponding to the excommunication spoken of in 1 Cor. v,  
 which surely must have been the act of an ecclesiastical court\*. Selden  
 makes it imply at least an exclusion from fellowship in holy assemblies,  
 and considers it as equivalent to that excommunication which, according  
 to Tertullian, existed in his days in the Christian church†. Ludovicus  
 Capellus, in his Specilegio upon John ix. 22, affirms that the Jewish  
 excommunication by *Niddui* was an ecclesiastical censure, and excluded  
 from a communion in holy things, and insinuates the same of the other  
 modes of excommunication. Goodwin, in his Moses and Aaron, book v.  
 chap. i, speaking of the Jewish ecclesiastical court, says, that to the  
 members of it belonged the power of excommunication, and that it was  
 a representative church: “ Hence,” says he, “ is that (Matth. xviii. 17),  
*dic ecclesiæ*—“ tell the church.” The famous Bertram, moreover, in  
 his book de Repub. Hebræor. lib. vii, thinks that the Jewish excommunication  
 by *Niddui* was similar to our suspension from the sacrament, and that  
 their excommunication by *Cherem* answered to our excommunication  
 from the church. And Grotius, in his Annotations on Luke vi. 22,  
 affirms that their excommunication resembled that of the ancient  
 Druids, who excluded those who were under it from the public sacrifices—  
 “ interdixerunt sacrificiis.” On the whole, it may be remarked that  
 in the twenty-four cases in which excommunication was inflicted (mentioned  
 by Buxtorf, Lexicon, p. 1304, 1305.—Selden de Jure Nat. et Gentium,  
 lib. iv, cap. viii.—and Joh. Coch. in his Annotations in Excerpt. Gem.  
 Sanhedrin, cap. ii. p. 147), there were several in which not only civil and  
 external injuries, but religious scandals, were the reason of their  
 infliction. One cause, was the despising of any of the precepts of the law  
 of Moses,

\* See his Lexicon Chald. Talmud. et Rabbin. edit. 1639, p. 827, 828.

† See his Treatise de Jure Nat. et Gentium, lib. iv, cap. ix.

or Statutes of the Scribes ; another, *the mentioning of the name of God rashly*, or a *vain oath* ; another, the tempting of others, or presenting to them occasion to *profane the name of God* ; another, making them to *eat holy things without the temple* ; another, the preventing of them from *fulfilling the commandments* ; another, *a presenting a profane offering*, according to Buxtorf, or *a sickly animal*, according to Coch. ; another, a priest's *not separating the gifts of an oblation*, &c. ; in all of which instances, as well as others which might be stated, it is plain that it was not civil injuries, but religious scandals, that were the grounds of the excommunication, and consequently that the synagogue and sanhedrin, which pronounced this excommunication, must certainly be viewed as ecclesiastical courts.

Thus, then, it appears that the synagogue and sanhedrin, whatever connection they might have in another view with civil matters, must be considered as ecclesiastical courts—that they were instituted, if not upon explicit divine warrant, yet with the express permission and approbation of the Deity—and that the allusion of our Saviour, in Matth. xviii, to these Jewish courts, whatever of them is intended, fully warrants the deduction of Presbyterians from this passage, that similar courts should exist also in the Christian church, and the government be vested in their hands, unless it can be proved from other passages, that it is not merely ecclesiastical rulers in particular, but the members of every Christian congregation in general, who are now to govern the church of God.

## APPENDIX II.

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### REMARKS ON A VIEW OF SOCIAL WORSHIP, &c.

BY

JAMES ALEXANDER HALDANE.

SINCE the preceding Vindication of Presbytery was written, a book, by the author now mentioned, has been published in defence of Independency. Expecting to find in it an abler, or at least a fuller defence of the principles which are here controverted than is contained in the publications of Messrs. Innes or Ewing, I read it with avidity, but must confess that I have been completely disappointed. For any additional argument which it brings forward, it might, as far as I can judge, have remained unpublished, without any material injury either to the reputation of the author, to the instruction of the world, or to the particular cause which it is meant to serve. It abounds with professions of candour, of the most liberal charity, and of the most serious and disinterested regard for truth. And yet while Mr. Haldane avowedly examines Presbytery *in general*, and points out the evils which he thinks result from it, he almost uniformly improves it into a pretext for haranguing, chiefly against our Established Church, and for exhorting her members to renounce her communion. Were there not other churches however, as the Relief, and Burgher, and Antiburgher, which are equally zealous in supporting Presbytery, and which, of course, equally merited his censure? How comes it then, that, in his impartial and unbiassed representation of truth, the evils which he supposes necessarily to result from this scheme *in general*, should be urged, with such zeal, as reasons for separation, only from *our* Presbyterian church? Is the very same plan worse when found in *the Church of*



*Scotland* than in other societies? Besides, if he was induced by any particular reasons to be peculiarly zealous against this Church, why did he not uniformly guard against misrepresentations, and strictly adhere to that truth for which he so frequently professes his regard?

Of the justice of this stricture, I shall at present mention one instance, taken from a Note, p. 409. "Every one," says he, "who dies in the communion of the Church of England is committed to the grave as a dear brother, of whose resurrection certain hope is expressed. Although this is not the form in Scotland, yet *the spirit of the constitution is the same*. All are Christians, and consequently all go to heaven." Now, let me ask Mr. Haldane on what ground he rests his assertion, that the constitution of our church on this point, is the same with that of the Church of England; or that it is one of the articles of its constitution, that all within its pale are Christians, and consequently that all of them go to heaven? Is it not an opinion which she has uniformly and publicly held, that neither in *her* communion, nor in that of any church upon earth, are all Christians, nor will all go to heaven; for if in the little company of the twelve apostles there was one traitor, will there not be many such in more numerous societies? And does she not in her Confession of Faith, chap. xxix. sect. viii, expressly delineate, in terms which completely contradict his assertion, the character of those who are worthy communicants, and shall finally be saved? "Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament," (and here it is plainly supposed that they may receive them in her communion as well as in that of other churches) "yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but, by their unworthy coming thereunto, are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Wherefore all *ignorant and ungodly persons*, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so they are unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto." Since it is affirmed then, in this and other passages, that ignorant and ungodly men may be found in her communion, and that such are utterly unfit to partake of the supper, and consequently no less unfit for heaven, how could this writer, when conscious of these facts, so confidently assert that it is the

spirit of her constitution, “ that all who die in her connection go to heaven, and that of their happy resurrection no doubt can be entertained ? ”

It is remarkable also, that when he professes to be very *seriously* searching after truth, and to present us with the evidence on both sides of the question, he should amuse himself and the reader with a silly and trifling sneer, while he passes very slightly over any thing like argument. This is particularly the case in p. 166, where he introduces a stale and inapposite witticism of Dr. Hardy, late Ecclesiastical Professor in the University of Edinburgh. “ He was in the use,” says he, “ of telling his students, that Synod-sermons used formerly to be divided into four heads, proving the divine right, 1. Of Kirk-sessions—2. Of Presbyteries—3. Of Synods—4. Of General Assemblies.—What a pity, said he, that the preachers should have forgot to have proved the divine right of the Committees of Overtures and Bills ! ! ” Now, on this it may be remarked that Independents can no more prove the divine right of their Committees, who inquire into the knowledge and character of any applicant for membership, than Presbyterians can establish, from explicit expressions, the divine right of the Committees of Overtures and Bills. Dr. Hardy’s sneer therefore, if at all just, must fall with equal force upon these Independent Committees. Besides, as we have already attempted to shew that Kirk-sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies, are authorized by scripture, and as Committees of Bills and Overtures consist only of certain members from the former, who are to prepare the business for more prompt decision—as the scripture enjoins also, that all things be done decently and in order, and as this plan appears often to be best fitted for this end, what is there either ridiculous or reprehensible in the adoption of it ? Independents themselves, as was now said, appoint Committees, though no such institutions be specified in scripture, and why may not these Presbyterian Committees be likewise nominated, if conducive to the purposes of general utility. It would certainly therefore have been more beneficial, had Mr. Haldane, instead of quoting this very feeble witticism, at least, endeavoured, to answer a few more of the arguments produced in favour of Presbytery, and to state some more forcible reasons in support of Independency.

In p. 54, he quotes with applause the words of one who says, that he adores the fulness of scripture; and then adds, "This fulness, respecting *every thing* connected with religion, will be more evident the better we understand it. When we come to speak of the order and discipline of the first churches, I hope it will appear that no case *can* occur in a church of Christ concerning which we have not sufficient directions in the New Testament. These directions do not exclude the exercise of prudence and discretion. Wisdom is necessary to apply the laws of Christ properly; but to use our wisdom in the application of laws, is widely different from assuming a right to add to, or to alter them." Now, if it is here insinuated that *every* practice in a church of Christ must be enjoined by scripture in explicit terms, the assertion is inadmissible, because it supposes what is not only utterly impracticable, but contradictory to the acknowledged principles both of Presbyterians and Independents. Is every part either of the order or worship in the churches of the latter expressly prescribed in the sacred volume? Is there any passage, as was now stated, that appoints a committee of the members of the church to examine the knowledge and character of any person who applies for membership? or does it appear that this was done in any of the churches which are mentioned in the New Testament? Is there any passage which authorizes Independents to sing hymns, or paraphrases of scripture, in addition to the version of the Psalms of David? We are indeed exhorted by Paul, Col. iii. 16, as Mr. Haldane observes, p. 303, to sing, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, but nothing certain can be deduced from this in support of that practice, for as all these names are applicable to the Psalms of David, many of which are hymns and spiritual songs, the apostle, for aught that can be ascertained from this place, might refer only to them\*. Omitting other practices which might be mentioned, is there any passage which requires Christians always to stand while they sing? Mr. Haldane indeed says, p. 304, that praise is an immediate address to God? But so also is prayer; yet, like our Saviour, we may certainly either stand and lift up our eyes

\* It is not intended by this to deny the propriety of singing such paraphrases, but only to shew that there is no express warrant for the use of them from scripture.

to heaven, or fall upon our faces to the ground, or, like Paul, bow our knees to our God and Father. It is indeed farther said, that Israel was exhorted to *stand up* and bless the Lord their God: Neh. ix. 5. It appears, however, from what follows, that what the Israelites did when they stood up *at that time*, was to offer up a prayer, and not merely to sing a psalm. Compare Neh. ix, from ver. 6, to the end. At any rate, the contrary will not be easily proved. What argument then can be deduced for this practice of Independents from the present passage? Is it alleged notwithstanding, as is done by Mr. Haldane, that it is plain from Psal. cxxxiv. 1, that the Israelites must have stood when they sang to God? It is remarked in return, that it is evident from ver. 2, that it is the duty of prayer, and not of praise, which is there represented to be required from them: “*Lift up your hands* in the sanctuary,” it is said, “and bless the Lord.” It is said, moreover, that it is undeniable from Psal. cxxxv. 1, 2, 3, that the Israelites stood up when they sang praises to God; for they “who stood in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of God,” are there called to praise the Lord. Yet from any thing contained in these verses, the Psalmist might call on those alone, who stood in the temple as sentinels or priests, to praise the Lord, as he afterwards calls on the people at large, who did not stand in it, for these purposes. But though he enjoins those who stood for these purposes in the courts of the temple, and whom he afterwards denominates (ver. 19, and 20), “the house of Aaron and the house of Levi,” as he also enjoins (ver. 1), the servants of the Lord in general to do so, whom he afterwards denominates (ver. 19, “the house of Israel,” what argument can fairly be drawn from this, to shew that the Israelites at large stood when they praised the Lord? Nay, even granting that those who (ver. 2), stood in God’s house were the Israelites in general, who stood in the outer courts of the house of the Lord at the time of the offering up of incense, and prayed to God—and also when they presented their sacrifices, what argument does this afford to prove that they stood likewise when they sang his praises? And, in fine, are we reminded that the church in heaven are described as standing before the throne (Rev. vii. 9), when they offer up their praises? To this it is sufficient to reply in the words of his friend Mr. Ballentine, which he cites with approbation, p. 227. “The

“ whole book of Revelation, the epistolary as well as the figurative parts, are written in a figurative manner.” Is not this more probable, from the description (chap. viii. ver. 3), of an angel as coming and standing at an altar in heaven, having a golden censer; and to whom was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints? And yet who would suppose that there is an altar in heaven, or incense, or a censor; or that altars should be erected in the church on earth, and that ministers, when they offer up the prayers of God’s people, should have incense and censers? On the whole, this idea is confirmed by the 11th and 12th verses of the seventh chapter, following those quoted by Mr. Haldane, and informing us, that while part of the celestial inhabitants *stand* while they offer up their praises, part of them also *fall upon their faces*! But would any Independent argue from this, that the members of their churches should *sometimes fall upon their faces* when they present their praises\*, though he is surely as much warranted to affirm this, as to affirm that they should *stand*, because another part of the heavenly inhabitants are represented as standing when engaged in that exercise? But if the scripture seems to point out no particular posture for the performance of praise, nor no particular warrant for singing any other sacred hymns or spiritual songs than the Psalms of David, nor no precise example nor injunction for a committee, similar to that which is employed by Independents, to inquire into the knowledge and character of those who apply for membership; nay, if for many other things which might easily be mentioned, Independents have no express directions in the New Testament, though they do not hesitate to adopt them; is it not incontrovertible, that if it be asserted that every the minutest circumstance respecting the order and discipline of the church is explicitly revealed, a position is maintained which is not, and cannot be acted upon by any church upon earth? It would appear then, that in many things Independents themselves, as well as others, are obliged to act on the principle of *expediency*: and yet there are none who are louder than they in reprobating this principle, and, among these, there are few who are keener than our author.

\* It is said, that what was uttered by those who fell on their faces was a prayer? It is answered, that it was no more a prayer than what was spoken by those who stood before the throne.



It is granted indeed, that like every other principle, that of expediency may be perverted; and that, when so perverted, it must be very prejudicial. Its abuse however can never be a valid argument against its utility. Though, when employed by wicked and designing men to set aside the great and fundamental principles of order and discipline which are revealed in scripture, it has been attended with evil, yet this will never prove that it may not be followed by good, when used to support inferior practices, which do not contradict but promote the former, though at the same time they are not explicitly revealed. By many Independent churches, it is practised in many instances, and must therefore, even in *their* opinion, be attended with advantage.

The question, *when* the principle of expediency is to be followed, every Independent is as much bound to answer as the Presbyterian is, unless he maintain that there is an explicit warrant in scripture for every practice in their churches. An observance or practice indeed, though not expressly revealed, may be safely adopted, whenever it does not contradict any of the essential principles of government, or when it is warranted by other acknowledged general principles. Nor do we hesitate again to assert, that this principle is admitted and acted on by every society\*. To follow the author

\* We may here notice, that this principle must be applied to regulate the precise degree of frequency with which the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated, as we have already attempted to shew that it is not expressly revealed. See Note in p. 212, *et seq.* Mr. Haldane indeed endeavours to prove that it is to be received every Sabbath; and argues that because it is said, 1 Cor. xi. 20, that when the disciples came together, they ate the Lord's Supper, and in chap. xvi. 2, that they came together on the first day of the week, they must have observed this ordinance every first day of the week. But this argument proves too much; for if they did eat the Supper every time they came together, they must frequently have received it twice or thrice a-week at least, for it is to be presumed that, like Independents, they might meet in a church-capacity on other days than Sabbath. Why then do not Messrs. Haldane, Ewing, and Little, join in commemorating the death of Jesus when they and their *churches* come together into one place, for public instruction or private discipline, on the evenings of Wednesday, or Thursday, or Friday?

It deserves to be remarked also, that as the apostle does not say that the Corinthians *always* ate and drank in the name of the Lord when they were met in a church-capacity, how does Mr. Haldane know how frequently they did so? or how can he affirm that they did so weekly? He tells us, however, that it was thus frequently

through the whole of his inconsistencies on the different subjects of which he treats, would neither be practicable within the narrow bounds of the present Appendix, nor connected with the principal design of the preceding Letters. I shall only point out, as shortly as possible, a few of his inaccuracies on the subject of *government*, as this alone is the ground of these inquiries.

In reviewing his sentiments on this topic, it is impossible not to notice the very striking contradiction between his views and those of Messrs. Ewing and Little. Mr. Ewing, as we have shewn, p. 19, 20, 89, 90, most pointedly affirms that *every thing* which is to be done, as a part of ecclesiastical government and discipline, is not to be done in the presence of the people and only with their consent. Mr. Haldane, on the contrary, asserts, p. 153, and other places, “that the elders are to put the laws of Christ in execution, “but only with consent and in presence of the church.” And one of the rules followed by Mr. Little in his Tabernacle-church, as quoted in the Narrative referred to, p. 14, is, that *every thing* should be submitted to the vote of the members before it is finally adopted. Mr. Haldane, on the contrary, while he maintains that nothing should be done without their consent, and while he contends, p. 212, “that “every new member ought to be admitted by *the unanimous*

observed by Christians in the first and second century. But we have formerly shown, that the argument is as conclusive in favour of *daily* as of *weekly* communion. Besides, with what consistency can this argument be used by one, who, in the very book which contains it, decidedly protests against its admission in religious disputes. “If any of the religious rites of any party,” says he, p. 51, “be called in question, do they not uniformly endeavour to establish these, by appealing to the practice of the primitive Christians? Indeed so far has this been carried, that the practice of the three first centuries after Christ has also been resorted to. “This has opened a *wide door for abuses*. It goes upon the supposition, that, during that time, the churches retained their original purity; but surely we may learn from the corruptions in the churches, even in the days of the apostles, that this was most improbable. We are even expressly warned upon this subject, “by being informed that the mystery of iniquity was at work in “their time.” But if it *opens a wide door for abuse*, as he here asserts, to appeal to the practice of the churches, after the apostles, upon any question, why does Mr. Haldane, not only on this question, but on that of baptism, p. 333, 334, exhibit a very striking instance of this impropriety?

“voice of the church,” objects very strongly to the practice of voting. “We have no instance in the scriptures,” says he, p. 372, “of any thing in the primitive churches being decided by votes. This appears at all times unnecessary, and can be attended with no good effect.” It is manifest then, that among three of the most zealous of our Tabernacle Independents, there is a decided and important opposition of sentiment, on matters, too, which affect some of the first principles of Independency. Might not Mr. Haldane then, in his very laudable solicitude for the purity of the church, have bestowed a portion of his strictures and animadversions on his two erring brethren; and, while he attempts to correct the errors of the members of our Establishment, have extended some salutary castigation to Messrs. Ewing and Little, of whom the former has advanced an opinion subversive of Independency, and the latter has not scrupled to avow a sentiment which, in Mr. Haldane’s apprehension, is hostile to its interests?

To maintain, moreover, as Mr. Haldane here does, that every decision in an Independent congregation ought to be perfectly unanimous, and that, when this cannot be the case, no determination should be made, seems completely ridiculous. Suppose, as was remarked, p. 40, a case of discipline to occur in an Independent church, in which a difference of opinion obtained how far a charge was distinctly proved—that the majority are fully satisfied that the person against whom it is brought is guilty, and that the minority profess themselves of an opposite mind; nay, suppose that long and patient inquiry should be made into the matter, and that, as Mr. Haldane advises, much fervent prayer should be employed, and that still the members cannot agree—what will be the consequence? A majority of ninety out of a hundred members, who are convinced that the person who is criminated is guilty, are not to inflict on him the merited punishment, because they cannot persuade their brethren to adopt their views. Or if they do inflict it upon him, since *unanimity* must prevail among all who are associated as an Independent church, the minority must necessarily separate from the majority. In *every* instance, of course, where the minority cannot be persuaded to think with the majority, and where the laws of Christ must be put in execution, a separation must take place, and new and more numerous Independent churches, from every new minority, must conti-

nually be forming. And, indeed, combining this favourite principle of Messrs. Haldane and Glass with the assertion of Mr. Ewing, (see p. 90, and 91, of these Letters), that the members of a church may separate from their brethren, and form new societies, for difference of sentiment on the merest trifles, we have another very impressive and faithful representation of the *schismatic* tendency of the Independent scheme. *Perfect unanimity*, say Messrs. Glass and Haldane, must be observed in *all* the decisions of the church—votes must be excluded; and, till the unanimity can be fully attained, forbearance must be exercised, and the laws of Christ must not be executed. And when the period of this forbearance comes to an end, though the difference of sentiment be upon a point which is trifling, the minority, says Mr. Ewing, are at perfect liberty, and are in duty bound, since unanimity is requisite in every church, to turn away from the majority, and erect themselves into a new congregation\*!!!

The views which Mr. Haldane gives of *the nature* of the power which is claimed by Presbyterians are, like the statements of many other Independents, unfair and exaggerated. He calls it, for instance, like his predecessor Mr. Lockier, p. 158, “human authority or coercion,” and in p. 159, “compulsory power.” It has already however been at-

\* Since every member of an Independent congregation is admitted by the elder, who presides at the time, to state his opinion, and as nothing more is expressed by a vote, I cannot see on what consistent grounds Messrs. Haldane and Glass can object to voting. As the members of the churches, too, mentioned in scripture, according to them, voted in the election both of Matthias and the first deacons, and as Independents still vote, in many congregations, in the election of their office-bearers, why may they not vote in other decisions? In a word, should it be said that the reasoning contained in the preceding Letters cannot be conclusive, because it proceeds upon the false supposition that all the members of an Independent congregation are allowed to vote in every business; it is replied, that it can never be overthrown by this, for if they are not allowed to vote, they are undoubtedly permitted to express their judgment, and only in as far as it accords with it can any proposal be carried. But in what respects this privilege *virtually* differs from that of voting, or how the latter can be attended with worse effects, I acknowledge that I am utterly unable to perceive. As Independents, though they allow the members to speak, do not finally determine till they are completely unanimous, might not the same thing be done, even though a vote was taken?

tempted to be proved (Letter II), that no more authority, nor coercion, nor compulsion, is assumed by Presbyterians than by Independents\*; and that the only difference between the two is this, that, among the former, the elders alone are intrusted with the government, while, among the latter, though the elders are the nominal rulers, the people also must be consulted on every occasion. But this, as has at least been endeavoured to be established in the Third Letter, is to constitute the persons who are appointed to be ruled, and who are far more numerous than the titular governors, in reality the rulers. And to talk of *governors*, as is done by this author, p. 262, and 263, *ruling* their congregations merely by presiding in their assemblies, and by persuading them to their duty, while they are totally unable to *inflict upon them any punishment* if they refuse to comply with their requisitions, seems to be very absurd†.

\* The same power which Mr. Haldane says, p. 372, line 21, “is in the church itself,” and to which every member is subject; a power which authorizes them, as he tells us, p. 350, “if they look to Christ for direction, and form a deliberate judgment, to act according to it against an offending member, *whether he be convinced or not* :” the same power, we say, is all for which Presbyterians contend for their office-bearers. They admit too with him, p. 258, that these office-bearers, who are rulers only under Jesus, have no more power *to make laws* than Independents themselves ascribe to their churches. They allow also, as much as Independents themselves, that “rulers cannot require the church, or any individual member, to submit to their decisions, unless they can shew that the authority of Christ enjoins submission in that particular act.” And at the same time they maintain, that “if they look to Christ for direction, and form a deliberate judgment, they must act according to it, whether those who are under them *are convinced or not*,” as Mr. Haldane declares, in the passage now quoted, must be done by the members of an Independent congregation to an offending brother.

† High indeed was the esteem which was formerly professed by our author, and many of his friends, for the Rev. Rowland Hill, a man who once warmly patronised them. No man however, can speak more strongly in condemnation of the system which they *now* profess than this very writer, whom they certainly once accounted a man peculiarly distinguished for candour and charity. “One extreme,” says he, p. 108, of his Remarks attached to his Journal, and *addressed to our author*, “generally produces another. However I might be disposed to vote for the reduction of the Episcopacy of the English Church, yet I had much rather be under the Right Reverend Fathers in God with us, than under the jurisdiction of the *Most Reverend Mothers* in God among the



It is observed likewise by Mr. Haldane, p. 366, that “the idea of a church of Christ sitting by its representatives” (as the pastors or elders have improperly been called) “has no foundation in scripture—and that all the

“stricter Independents.—*Medio tutissimus ibis.*” Again, says he, p. 80. “To take a candid and general view of this mode of church-discipline, (that of the Church of Scotland), I am not surprised, allowing something for education, that every class of Seceders should have still adhered to her *general* rules. For, admitting in the first place, the just requisition of the choice of ministers to rest with the people, it is but consistent that the further management should in a measure rest with others. If it be with the people to appoint, and to accuse in case of misconduct; it is but reasonable that others should determine the justice of that accusation. If the total controul rests with those that appointed him to the office, the rule is perfectly reversed: Obey them that have the *rule* over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account: that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable unto you: Heb. xiii. 17. For, supposing the controul to be with the people, it is *they*, that are to have *the rule over him*, and he must *be admonished by them*. He is neither shepherd, nor pastor, to watch over; nor elder, to rule over them; nor bishop, to oversee them: he knows nothing of *authority* but by their *permission*, and is perfectly *the creature of their caprice and controul*. All disputes, therefore, under such a frame of government, must terminate in divisions. Now, in a *strict* Independent government,” (and such a government it appears exists in all our Scotch Tabernacle-congregations, that of Mr. Ewing excepted) “in a variety of instances, this fact is principally proved, because arbitration is wanting, and the Presbyterian government wisely provides for this arbitration.”

And, in short, he remarks upon Heb. xiii. 17, that “some have supposed the word *ἡγουμαι* would have been better translated by the softer term, to lead or guide, than to rule. The softer,” adds he, “the better, as tyranny is no more proper in the minister over the people, than it is in the people over the minister. But I judge we have here a distinction without a difference. When a man leads and guides, I think he may be said to rule; though I confess the word *rule*, and especially when attended with that of *submit*, is as *gripping* to the consequential old ladies in a strictly Independent church, as is the word *obey*, in the marriage-service of our English Liturgy, to many a female, when under the necessity of promising, for once, what she never means afterwards to perform!!”

If the word *ἡγουμαι* here signifies to lead, it means, as was proved, Letter II. to lead or guide in a way which implies the exercise of authority, though at the same time not inconsistent with the use of persuasion.

“ directions given by the apostles to the churches respecting discipline were evidently addressed to the whole church.” In proof of this, he adduces what is said by Paul to the church of Corinth respecting the incestuous person. But for an attempt at least to refute his very superficial statement of this argument, as well as the more able objections of Mr. Cotton, the reader is referred to Letter VII. And as to his remark in that page, “ that when the whole church joins in an act of discipline, it is calculated more to impress the mind of the offender, to manifest the obedience of the whole to the laws of Christ, and to create a greater abhorrence of sin in the church, for thus passing sentence on one another, they condemn themselves if they should ever act in a similar manner,” it proves a great deal too much. On the same principle, it would be better to admit all the lieges in a city to join in performing an act of civil juridical authority, than to commit that power to the magistrates alone: for it might be urged, with equal plausibility, that it is calculated more to impress “ the mind of an offender, to manifest the obedience of the community to the laws of the kingdom, and to create a greater abhorrence of the crime in them, for thus passing sentence on another, they would condemn themselves if they should ever act in a similar manner.” The sophistry of this reasoning is obvious, whether applied to church or politics. And if the lieges of a city, by submitting to the authority exercised by their magistrates when they inflict punishment upon any offender, as really express their obedience to the law, and their abhorrence of the crime, as if they themselves, in *any sense*, had been judges—nay, if, by submitting to that power which publicly pronounces sentence upon another, they as incontestably condemn themselves, if they should ever act in a similar manner, as if they had been magistrates, is not the same thing manifest as to the members of the church?

Another passage brought forward by Mr. Haldane, to shew that the people are to be admitted in every matter of government to an equality of power, with respect to judging, with the nominal rulers, is Matth. xviii. 17. And in confirmation of the arguments of Independents from this place, he fills up almost ten pages of his book with a quotation from Dr. Campbell, an author to whom he is not a little indebted; and with very copious citations from whose Lec-

tures on Church-history, his friend Mr. Ewing, with the editors of the late Edinburgh Quarterly Magazine and Liverpool Repository, have frequently enriched their writings. For an examination however of the remarks of the Doctor, and of Independents in general, upon that celebrated passage, see Letter VI. There it is observed, that by *the church* mentioned in Matth. xviii, to which offences are to be told, Mr. Parker of New England, a very eminent Independent, honestly allows that the first time it occurs, it means expressly *the aristocratic part*, or the elders: “*Præcise partem aristocraticam, id est presbyterium.*” There, too, it is at least endeavoured to be proved, that, in Acts viii, the term *church* denotes the office-bearers, and they alone; and that, even upon the interpretations of this place which have been given by the most famous Independent writers, it is an argument for Presbytery, and not for Independency, though it is urged by Mr. Haldane, with the rest of his brethren, as supporting the latter only. Let us hear, however, what is said by this distinguished writer, whose authority is quoted by Mr. Haldane, and under whose reasoning he seems more willing to shelter himself than under his own. “Let it be observed,” says he, as cited by our author, p. 148, “that our Lord gave these directions during the subsistence of the Mosaic establishment; and if we believe that he spoke intelligibly, or with a view to be understood, we must believe also, that he used the word in an acceptation with which the hearers were acquainted. Dodwell himself saw the propriety of this rule of interpreting (Distinction between Soul and Spirit, &c. sect. vii), when he said, It very much confirms me in my reasonings, when I find an interpretation of the scriptures not only agreeable to the words of the scripture, but agreeable also to the notions and significations of words then received. For that sense which was most likely to be then understood was, in all likelihood, the true sense intended by the Holy Ghost himself. Otherwise there could be no security that his true sense could be conveyed to future ages, if they had been themselves mistaken in it, to whose understanding the Holy Ghost was then particularly concerned to accommodate himself.’ Now all the then known acceptations,” says the Doctor, “as I shewed before, of the name *ἐκκλησια*, were these two, the whole Jewish people, and a particular congregation. The scope of the place suffi-

“ciently shews it could not be the former of these senses ;  
 “it must therefore be the latter. What further confirms  
 “this interpretation is, that the Jews were accustomed to  
 “call those assemblies which met together for worship in  
 “the same synagogue by this appellation, and had, if we  
 “may believe some learned men conversant in Jewish anti-  
 “quities, a rule of procedure similar to that here recom-  
 “mended, which our Lord adopted from the synagogue,  
 “and transplanted into his church.” Now admitting, as is  
 observed in Letter VI. the Doctor’s remark, which Mr.  
 Haldane quotes as one of the bulwarks of his system, that  
 the Jews were accustomed to call those assemblies which met  
 together for worship in the same synagogue by this appella-  
 tion, and allowing that they had a rule similar to that which  
 is here recommended, a consequence very different from what  
 is apprehended either by the Doctor, or the writer before  
 us, appears necessarily to follow. It seems unavoidably to  
 result from it, as was before proved, that, as in a Jewish  
 synagogue, though the offence is told in the *hearing* of the  
 members, it is those who are distinguished by the name of  
 rulers, and they alone, even without asking the opinion or  
 consent of the members, that are to judge and determine.  
 Such it was before evinced from the concessions of Good-  
 win, who says, that “there never could be less than *three*  
 “rulers in any synagogue, that a major vote *might cast it*  
 “*among them ;*” and such also, as was established from the  
 authority both of Josephus and Maimonides, were the  
 persons who administered these Jewish assemblies, and with-  
 out soliciting the consent of the people. This quotation  
 from Dr. Campbell therefore, instead of supporting this ar-  
 gument for Independency, appears completely to overthrow  
 it ; and proves, that though the members of a Christian  
 church, like those of a Jewish synagogue, may be allowed  
 to *hear* the complaint which is presented by a brother to  
 those who are rulers against one who offends him, it is the  
 office-bearers alone, without the consent or concurrence of  
 the members, that are to *judge* of the complaint, as it was  
 they alone who judged of similar matters in a Jewish syna-  
 gogue.

It is affirmed by Mr. Haldane, p. 164, that by “the  
 “whole church,” as it is translated in our Bibles, who are  
 represented as joining in the decree of the apostles and el-  
 ders at Jerusalem, (Acts xv. 22), members who had no of-

ficial character are intended. But before this is admitted, it is requested that what is mentioned, Letter XVI. p. 221, 222, may be answered. And if this should be answered, it is begged that what is stated, Letter VIII. may be fairly refuted, before any argument can be deduced from that passage, for the right of members in the present day to judge in every matter of ecclesiastical government. And, indeed, as Mr. Haldane expressly maintains that the decision which was pronounced by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem was an inspired decision, the reason which he assigns for allowing uninspired members to assist at this consultation is very extraordinary. "It may appear strange," says he, "that if a revelation was to be given respecting this matter, the whole church should be joined in the decree of the apostles, or that they and their elders, as well as the apostles, *should be called together to consult*. But by this means a great end was gained. The church heard all that could be said upon the subject, together with the decision of the chosen witnesses and ambassadors of Christ, and thus no doubt, would be disposed the more readily to embrace uncircumcised Gentiles as brethren in Christ." Though this however might be a very good reason for allowing the members of the church at Jerusalem *to hear* the deliberations and determination of this assembly, which Mr. Haldane describes as an inspired assembly, it appears, in every view, difficult to conceive how it could render it proper to admit men who were not inspired to consult with the former upon the present question. Could those who were in this situation add any thing to the information of those who were guided by an immediate miraculous influence; or for what purpose could those who were aided simply by their own sagacity be called together *to consult*, as Mr. Haldane affirms, with those who were directed by this extraordinary energy?

The third subject of inquiry contained in these Letters, namely, Whether there should be a class of elders who are only to rule, while there are others who preach as well as rule, is very cursorily examined by Mr. Haldane. He denies that there should be such an order, p. 230, and boldly asserts that the institution of it "was one of the steps of the mystery of iniquity by which the man of sin acquired such power." But, in opposition to this, the reader is requested to peruse with impartiality Letters IX. X. and XI.



where it is endeavoured to be proved, that this is an office, founded on reason, prescribed by scripture, and distinguished by the approbation of the most zealous and orthodox primitive fathers in the ages immediately posterior to the apostles. Let him consult especially the testimony produced from the writings which have frequently been ascribed to Ambrose, p. 126, to the existence of this particular order of elders in the earliest periods of the christian church; and to his declaration that it was on account of the discontinuance of this order, at the time at which he lived, that the power of the clergy had become so enormous:—the words of Bucer, which are there quoted, respecting the Bohemian churches, “who alone almost,” as he remarks, “*preserved* “*in the world* the purity of the doctrine, and the vigour “of the discipline of Christ,” amidst the universal corruption of the Romish church, and who had this order among them. Let him recollect, as is there stated, that it was to check these excesses which were practised at that period by the Romish clergy, that Calvin, at the Reformation, revived these elders. Let him attend to the fact, that *Roman Catholics* and episcopalians are not less zealous than Independents against this class of rulers; that, as is remarked by the learned Dr. Owen (himself an Independent), p. 142, there is not one new argument advanced against the passage in 1 Tim. v. 17, which has frequently been urged for ruling elders—not one exception given in to the affixing such a sense to it, but what has long since been coined by *Papists* and Prelatists, and managed with better colours than the Independents of his day were able to lay on them. Let him reflect, we say, upon these things, and then consider what he must think of the swaggering assertion of this author, that the institution of this order was one of the steps of the mystery of iniquity by which the man of sin acquired such power!!!

Rash, indeed, and unfounded as is this assertion, respecting the tendency of this order, it must be acknowledged to be less wonderful than some of the arguments by which he endeavours to shew that this order is not appointed in scripture. The ministers, he says, are called by Presbyterians the Clergy, or, as the Greek word from which it comes literally signifies, the men who are the peculiar inheritance of God, and the elders who rule but do not preach, Lay-elders, or the Laity. He next attempts to show that the

first of these names, ought to be appropriated to ministers, and that the people are as really a part of the clergy, or of the inheritance of the Lord, as the pastors; and having produced, in support of this, six very humorous pages from Dr. Campbell's Lectures, imagines that he has proved to the satisfaction of all, that there ought to be no such thing as the office of lay-elders, who rule and do not preach. But what connection this conclusion has with these premises, I profess myself completely unable to discover. Because some have applied to the elders who both teach and rule, and those who only rule, the names Clergy and Lay-elders, therefore there can be no such office as that of elders who rule but do not preach!! How astonishing! The man who can discern how the one of these sentiments follows from the other, possesses indeed no common portion of ingenuity and sagacity. Might it not as well be concluded, from the application of improper names to these elders, that there should not be an order of elders in the church, who are to preach and rule, as to infer, merely from the misapplication of these names to them (even granting it to be a misapplication), that there should not be a class of elders who are only to rule? Does Mr. Haldane, moreover, need to be informed, that even Calvin himself, the great reviver and champion for Presbytery, at the era of the Reformation, denies the distinction which he here reprobates, and yet strongly and expressly contends for these elders? Is he not sensible also, if he is willing to acknowledge it, that such Presbyterians as retain the terms Clergy and Lay-elders do not use them in the sense in which he represents them as employed by the Romish church? Will he venture to come forward, and, as an honest man, declare, whether it is an essential principle of Presbytery to require all who are connected with it to believe, as he would insinuate, p. 231, by his quotation from Dr. Campbell, that the ministers, who preach as well as rule, are called Clergy, "as being in this "present world God's *peculium*, or special inheritance?"—or that the members of its congregations at large, and elders who only rule in particular, are denominated Laymen, in common writings and conversations, from a Greek word which signifies a stone, because they resemble a stone (see p. 234), in ignorance and insensibility? Do they adopt the opinion of Altensfaig in his Lexicon, which he cites with very great approbation from Dr. Campbell, when rea-

soning against them? "A clergyman signifies a learned man, scientific, skilful, full of knowledge, accomplished, and intelligent. A layman, on the contrary, signifies an unlearned man, unskilful, silly, and *stony*?" And is every clergyman in their opinion, as we are told that he was in his, as quoted by Mr. Haldane, "in so far as he is a clergyman, respectable; and every layman, so far as he is such, despicable?" Or do they adopt the sentiments of Cardinal Bona, as copied from Dr. Campbell, p. 235, in relation to the care that should be taken by the clergy, that laymen may not be allowed *to do themselves harm by studying the profounder parts of scripture*, which their stupidity, as he expresses it, is utterly incapable of comprehending? "Concerning laymen," says he, "in whom pride the mother of blindness reigns, so far as respects those things which regard faith and morals. For when like idiots, they presume to explain the sacred writings, which are the most profound of all writings; and again, when they happen to possess any external accomplishments, they despise all others, and being thus doubly blinded by pride, they deservedly fall into that worst error through which they are infatuated by God, so that they know not how to discern what is good and what is evil. Wherefore, let not laymen read all the books of the sacred scripture." Will Mr. Haldane maintain that such is the acceptation in which the terms under review are understood by Presbyterians; or that such are the views entertained by the Church of Scotland of the Clergy and Lay-elders, as they are called by some, or of the Laity in general? Is not all that is meant when her ministers or members speak of her clergy, persons who are ordained to teach and rule; and when they talk of lay-elders, those of the people who are elders in the church, and yet are only to rule and not to preach? And upon what principle of common sense can it be made to appear, that because *neither the terms* Clergy nor Elders are to be found in scripture, there cannot be two separate classes of office-bearers, one who preach as well as rule, and another who rule but do not preach?

It is granted by Mr. Haldane, p. 237, that there may be a diversity of gifts among elders, and that it is not improper for each of them peculiarly to apply his mind to, and to be chiefly engaged in that particular part of duty for which he is best qualified. "One man may be best qualified for la-

"bouring in public ; another may be his superior in con-  
 "versation, and may more eminently promote the edification  
 "of the church by more private admonition and instruction."  
 The truth of this remark he illustrates by two instances,  
 taken from characters in political life. "Dr. Franklin,  
 "says he, so justly celebrated for his wisdom and genius,  
 "seldom or never made a speech in Congress ; yet such was  
 "the estimation of his judgment and penetration, that his  
 "opinion, delivered in a short sentence or two, had generally  
 "the greatest weight. Mr. Addison had no talents for  
 "public speaking, and yet he was secretary of state. Had  
 "these men been members of a church, and excelled as  
 "much in the knowledge of divine things as they did in  
 "other things, would they not have been eminently quali-  
 "fied for overseeing or feeding the flock of God ? Now,  
 if, as was before proved, there is to be a diversity of offices  
 in the church of Christ corresponding to the diversified gifts  
 of the members, and if there be some members, though ad-  
 mirably fitted for ruling, as little qualified for being preach-  
 ers as Dr. Franklin or Mr. Addison were for being public  
 speakers, is it not evident, even upon his own principles, that  
 there should be some elders who are only to rule and not to  
 preach in the church of God ?

In confirmation of his remarks upon the necessity of a di-  
 versity of ecclesiastical offices corresponding to the diversi-  
 fied gifts of the members, he refers us to 1 Tim v. 17.  
 "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double  
 "honour, especially they who labour in the word and doc-  
 "trine. That by double honour," says he, here is meant  
 "larger temporal support, is evident not only from the fre-  
 "quent use of the word *τιμη* in this sense, but from the  
 "reason of the precept ; for, adds the apostle, Thou shalt  
 "not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn ; and the  
 "labourer is worthy of his reward ; ver. 18. This support  
 "is to be bestowed both on those who rule, and on those  
 "who preach, although more abundantly on the former.  
 "Some," says he, "in order to avoid a distinction be-  
 "tween *preaching* and *ruling* elders, consider the precept  
 "to respect those elders who are laborious in the discharge  
 "of their duty ; but this implies the absurdity of the church  
 "being called to support in a liberal manner elders who  
 "were not laborious. The meaning of the precept seems  
 "obvious, that the elders who faithfully discharge their

“ duty should be liberally provided for, but that this was  
 “ especially their duty towards those who labour in the  
 “ word and doctrine. Their gifts were superior, they were  
 “ calculated for more extensive usefulness, they would re-  
 “ quire to devote more of their time to study and reading  
 “ and preaching the gospel, not merely in the church, but  
 “ to unbelievers around them, they stood in need of more  
 “ support from their brethren.”

After conceding however so much in favour of that very office which he had before asserted to be one of the steps of the mystery of iniquity by which the man of sin acquired such power, he advances an observation not less contradictory to the preceding sentiments than totally inconsistent with the text upon which it is made. “ If any,” says he, “ from this text (1 Tim. v. 17), infer that the elders who rule well are not *entitled* to preach, they must also maintain that the elders who preach are not entitled to rule; a restriction which has never been, and is not likely to be advanced.” But are we not instructed in this very passage, that the elders who labour in word and doctrine must also *rule well*, before they can be entitled, *in preference* to others, to the double honour here mentioned? And is it not as expressly affirmed (as observed, Letter XI.) that other elders, when they merely rule well, and do not *labour in the word and doctrine*, are also entitled to double honour? Does it not follow of course, since none can receive this liberal support who do not perform *the whole of their duty*, that there must be a class of elders who fulfil all the duties which they are called to perform when they merely *rule well*, and at the same time a distinct class who are *not only to rule*, but to be employed in preaching the word and doctrine, and who must faithfully discharge *both* parts of their function before they can more especially be entitled from it to liberal maintenance? If, as the most learned of Independents however admits (Letter XI. p. 142), “ a rational man, who is unprejudiced, and *never heard of the controversy about ruling elders*, upon reading this text, can hardly avoid an apprehension that there are two sorts of elders, some who labour in the word and doctrine and rule well, and some who rule well, but do not so labour;” and if, as even a great Episcopalian maintains, p. 143, any man who would draw an opposite conclusion from these words *would speak nonsense*; how can Mr. Haldane with any justice assert,



“ that if any, from this text, infer that the elders who rule well are not *entitled* to preach, they must also maintain, that the elders who preach are not entitled to rule \* ?”

With regard to the *fourth* of the principles discussed in these Letters, or the subjection of the rulers of a particular congregation to the authoritative review of the rulers and office-bearers of a number of congregations met as a Presbytery, or Synod, or Assembly, Mr. Haldane is guilty of no less misrepresentation than on some of the preceding articles. “ From the view we have taken,” says he, p. 157, “ of the constitution of the apostolic churches, it appears, that although embarked in the same cause, they must have been completely independent of each other. Jesus has not even permitted an individual to transfer to a church the subjection which is only due to himself. Far less can we suppose, that he has given one church, or churches, dominion over others.” And again, “ Can any thing be found in scripture to countenance the idea of the dependence of congregations of saints upon one another? In vain do we look for it.” It is a well known fact however, as was before noticed, that Presbyterians claim for a Presbytery or Synod no more dominion over a particular congregation than an Independent church uniformly claims over each of its members, and that the former require none of their congregations to be more dependent upon them than an Independent church requires each of its members to be dependent upon it.

To prove that every particular congregation ought not to be independent of the review and controul of the ministers and elders of a number of congregations, we before referred (Letters XV. and XVI), to what is said in scripture of the church at Jerusalem. This church we then endeavoured to shew, from the number of those who are represented as having been added to it at different times, and who stately resided there—from the number also of the ministers who laboured in it for many years, and from the variety of lan-

\* “ Some good people who met in the North,” says Mr. Rowland Hill, p. 152, “ rigid for Independency, thought they had proved that all elders were preachers, by asking if all preachers were not elders; the first proposition being granted, it was supposed the other would follow in course. It is just as readily granted, that all kings are men, but it is not as readily proved therefrom, that *all men are kings*.”

languages which were requisite for its edification, must have consisted of several congregations, which, though administered by their separate and particular rulers, were subject also to one common government. In opposition to this, Mr. Hal-dane remarks, p. 153. "We are but imperfectly acquainted with the state of things at Jerusalem. The temple-worship was completely different from any thing among us. Vast crowds of Jews came up to the great feast from every part of Judea and the adjacent countries. We have no reason to suppose that the thousands who believed were all fixed inhabitants at Jerusalem." And again, p. 154, "We learn from Josephus, that the multitude who assembled in the temple was immense." He says, (*Jewish War*, book vi. chap. ix), that "Cestius, under Nero, directed the high-priests to take the number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem at the time of the passover. They found the sacrifices to be 256,500, which, allowing ten persons to each victim (the ordinary number), amounts to 2,565,000 persons, pure according to the rites of the law, deducting those who by uncleannesses could not partake at this feast \*. He elsewhere estimates the number of those who assembled at the feast of the passover (book ii. chap. xiv), at 3,000,000, a number to which the usual resident inhabitants bore no proportion." But allowing that some of these converts were not stated inhabitants of Jerusalem, it has already been shewn that the number of those who are represented as having their usual residence there, was far too great for a single congregation. And, indeed, if Jerusalem, as he allows, was so large as to accommodate three millions at the time of the passover, the number of its fixed inhabitants must have been very great. When therefore we consider the success of the gospel, in that favoured period, in *other* places—the number of the ministers constantly engaged in this important work in the city of Jerusalem, and yet that they could not find time to serve the poor—and that they were thus employed in this city for almost thirty years, is it possible to believe that no more were converted by all of them in that space, than could conveniently meet for receiving the sacrament, and for other re-

\* Basnage says, in his *History of the Jews*, book i. chap. ix, that sometimes two millions and seven hundred thousand persons convened,

ligious purposes, in one congregation? Was this the time when, agreeably to the intimations of ancient prophecy (Psal. cx), the spiritual offspring of Christ were to surpass in number the drops of dew from the womb of the morning? and was the proportion of these, as Independents affirm, that were to be found among the fixed inhabitants of Jerusalem, no more, in a space of almost thirty years, than one congregation? If so, indeed, the success of probably a hundred ministers in Jerusalem must have been extremely small; and it seems difficult to account for this very extraordinary fact, that while the rest of the world needed so much the means of salvation, so many ministers should have remained in that city for so long a period though their labours were so ineffectual, while other preachers, in many other places, were made in a much more distinguished degree to triumph in Christ. On the whole, as was before hinted, p. 207, 208, does not this assertion of Independents strengthen the hands of infidels, and weaken, if not annihilate, one of the grandest and most powerful arguments for Christianity—that which is drawn from its astonishing success in the early ages? If the number of followers which, during thirty years, it gained even in Jerusalem, where our Saviour lived, and died, and rose again—where so many apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, and pastors ministered—where so many miracles were performed, and so many Jews resided—was so small, how much smaller must have been their number in other places which were less highly distinguished? In every point of view then, we seem bound to acknowledge that the number of converts, among the stated inhabitants of Jerusalem, must have been much greater than could meet merely in a single congregation. And since the whole of these different congregations in Jerusalem, as was before specified, are represented as constituting one church, subject to the same common and general government, it certainly presents a very powerful argument for subjecting a number of separate congregations, in the present day, to a similar government, while they are subordinate also to their own particular rulers\*.

\* It was before remarked, that even allowing that the temple could have contained the whole of the Christians at Jerusalem, it does not appear that the apostles were permitted to preach in it at pleasure, after they are said to have been beaten for this: Acts v.

As to the passages which he produces, p. 156, 157, to shew that the whole of the believers in Jerusalem were accustomed to meet for religious purposes in one assembly, they have been considered in the preceding Letters.

As has already been remarked, the fifteenth chapter of the book of Acts has often been urged as an argument for Presbyterian courts of review. But without endeavouring to overthrow the reasoning on which this inference is founded, Mr. Haldane does not hesitate very roundly to assert, p. 159, that “ the passage is wholly inapplicable to the “ purpose.” And having proved by *this assertion* that it is thus inapplicable, he details at length the theory of Independents, which has before been examined in our review of this chapter.

In the account, too, which Mr. Haldane gives of this reference, there are many affirmations inconsistent with the simple narrative contained in this passage. He maintains, for instance, that the decision delivered was an inspired decision ; and one reason, he tells us, p. 160, why the church at Antioch submitted the controversy to the decision of the assembly which met at Jerusalem was, that “ the apostles “ were still there, who were the chosen witnesses of the “ death and resurrection of Christ, Acts x. 41, to whom in “ a particular manner, the promise of the Spirit was given, “ to guide them into all truth, John xvi. 13.” But was not the reference made, not only to the apostles, but to the elders at Jerusalem ? Acts xv. 2. Were not the latter admitted to join in the consultation ? Are they not, as well as the apostles, represented in the decree, as laying necessary burdens upon the Christians at Antioch ; ver. 28. Yet unquestionably they were not inspired ; and if so, must not the apostles also, in the present matter, have acted as uninspired ? for, as has already been proved, the elders could neither have been admitted to consult nor determine, had the apostles

But even admitting, as is stated, Acts v. 42, that they were permitted frequently after this, like any other Jews who were men of learning, to address the people from any passage of the Old Testament that was read in their hearing, and even granting that in these addresses, as is said in the text here cited, they took an opportunity to teach and preach to them Jesus, it is not credible that they would be allowed to meet there with the persons who composed their church alone, and deliberate in secret, like our present Independents, upon matters of government.

been guided by a miraculous influence : all they could have done, would have been simply to submit to the explicit supernatural decision of the Spirit speaking by the apostles.

He says, that the apostles, and elders, and *the church*, p. 161, “ came together to consider the question of the necessity of circumcision to salvation.” But, in opposition to this, we are informed, Acts xv. 6, that it was only “ the apostles and elders who came together to consider of the matter,” as it is to them alone, ver. 2, that it is represented as having been submitted. Besides, if an inspired decision was to be pronounced by the apostles alone, why was it requisite that the elders and church should come together to consider this point ? He asserts, that the disputing mentioned, ver. 7, did not take place among the apostles. But would not any one who looks at the 6th verse, and reflects upon the persons who are there described as coming together, imagine that it was among the same persons that the disputing spoken of, ver. 7, ensued ? And to affirm that it could not be among the apostles, “ because, in ordering the affairs of the church, they were under the infallible direction of the Spirit, and never differed in their doctrine,” is to take for granted the very thing to be proved. Might they not differ for a time in their discussions, to ascertain His mind upon this subject, as Paul and Peter, though apostles, differed at another time, upon another point ? Gal. ii. As Mr. Haldane moreover admits, p. 162, that the expression, *it seemed good to the Holy Ghost*, “ does not appear to refer,” as Mr. Innes contends, “ to the Spirit, as guiding the apostles, but to the testimony quoted by James from the word of God, concerning the Gentiles being received into the church,” it is difficult to conceive on what ground he can believe that the decision delivered by this assembly was inspired. To maintain that it was so, because “ it is inserted as a part of that scripture which cannot be broken,” is to advance an opinion which, unless it can be proved that the apostles and elders acted in this instance under a miraculous influence, is certainly untenable. Upon the same principle might it not be proved, that as the letter of Claudius Lysias, the Roman captain, (Acts xxiii. 26,—30), is inserted in scripture, he, too, must have been inspired ? Though “ circumcision, in short, was a solemn ordinance of God, and though it was therefore proper that it, as well as the law of Moses, should



“ thus publicly be declared to be no longer necessary for the “ acceptable worshippers of Jehovah,” yet it appears to be more than we can venture with safety to affirm, that this assembly, while they quoted scripture, and adduced miracles, in confirmation of their opinion, needed to be guided by a supernatural influence in making this declaration. This point can be determined only by scripture, and scripture says nothing to lead us to adopt the views of Mr. Haldane. Farther, when it is recorded that the apostles and elders, when consulted upon this matter, decided that circumcision was no longer necessary, and adduced scripture, and appealed to miracles, in support of their determination, and when we see similar sentiments advanced respecting the law of Moses in general, in other passages, no room is left for difference of opinion upon the present subject in future ages.

Is it said with Mr. Haldane, p. 164, that it cannot be demonstrated that the apostles acted in their uninspired capacity because elders were joined with them, for Timothy and Sosthanes are joined with Paul in the salutations of his Epistles, and yet, in writing them, he acted as inspired? This objection, as stated by Mr. Glass, had been considered before; and the reader is referred to the Letters which relate to this very interesting chapter for a reply to this quibble.

Again, we are told by Mr. Haldane, p. 163, that “ this council, as some call it, would rather authorize appeals to “ a particular church, an argument which has not escaped “ the Church of Rome.” It is answered, that we have repeatedly declared that the apostles and elders at Jerusalem were referred to by the church at Antioch, not as ministers of the church of Jerusalem, for neither the church of Jerusalem, nor any other individual church, was entitled to such power over the church at Antioch. They were viewed simply as ministers of Christ in general, and constituted a court of ecclesiastical office-bearers different from that which met at Antioch, and to whose authoritative review the latter was subordinate. But if they were not referred to as the ministers of Jerusalem, but simply as ministers of the church in general, and if the church at Jerusalem was not considered in it as having any authoritative superintendence as an individual society over the church at Antioch, the objection of Mr. Haldane is completely irrelevant. To tell us, moreover, that “ this argument has not escaped the Church of

“ Rome, and that Eckius, the famous adversary of Luther, “ used the very same weapons against that reformer, which “ Presbyterians employ against congregational government,” is to tell us nothing to the point. It amounts merely to this, that arguments which have been urged from this passage for Presbytery, have been urged also, though upon a different ground than is stated in these Letters, for the Roman Catholic system. But it will never follow, from their being advanced, however inconclusively, for the latter, that they may not be conclusive for the former. Many of the rational arguments, for instance, in favour of Independency, adduced by our author, agree *in substance* with the arguments adduced by the well known Thomas Paine, and other leveling demagogues, for the rights of the people in political democracy. But would Mr. Haldane allow that they were not conclusive for Independency, because they had been urged by Paine for Political democracy? Many arguments, too, which have been brought forward with propriety and success for a wise, superintending, particular Providence, have been employed to establish that all things were subject to a blind fatality. But would any man allow, that because they had not escaped the advocates for the latter, they were not conclusive for the former? And many arguments which have been employed by the apostle Paul, and other believers in the doctrine of justification without the works of the law, have been used by Antinomians for the purposes of licentiousness, to shew that men may live as they please. But would Mr. Haldane admit, that because the very same arguments had been adduced by Antinomians in support of their scheme which had been used by Paul in demonstration of the doctrine of justification by grace, they were not valid for the latter? If he would refuse, however, to grant this conclusion in these other cases, ought he not equally to reject it in the one before us, and allow, that even though the argument which has been deduced by Presbyterians and Roman Catholics from this passage, for their respective systems, had been the same (and the contrary has been proved), it might be inconclusive for the latter, while conclusive for the former?

In enumerating the distinguishing excellencies of Independency, Mr. Haldane mentions, as peculiar to it, circumstances which are common to it with Presbyterian government. He says, for example, p. 596; “ that an Indepen-

“dent church may exist equally under any form of civil government.” But cannot presbyterian churches exist equally under all forms of civil government? If the favourite principle of Mr. Haldane be adopted, that the civil government in any country, *of whatever form*, is not to interfere with the church, may not the church exist with equal ease under any government, whether it be Independent or Presbyterian? And even granting that it is to interfere like the British Government, to secure a comfortable maintenance to the clergy, as long as they do their duty, might not this be done under any form of political administration to Presbyterian churches, whether democratic, aristocratic, monarchical, or mixed? It cannot therefore be allowed to be one of the distinguishing excellencies of Independency, that it can exist equally under any form of civil government, since that is no more peculiar to it than to Presbytery, Episcopacy, or any other form of ecclesiastical administration.

“It in no shape,” says he, “interferes with any form of civil government, nor can, so far as it acts upon proper principles, be justly regarded as an object of jealousy to the state.” And then he adds in a Note, that “churches independent of each other, and acknowledging no head upon earth, are certainly far less formidable to civil government, than a great body comprehending thousands, it may be, in all different parts of the country, subject to an individual or to a representative body. The former, were they hostile to government, must alter their constitution before they could attempt any thing against the state.” But does not Presbytery also no less refrain from interfering with civil government, and, so far as it acts upon proper principles, is it not plain that it can no more justly be regarded as an object of jealousy to the state? Besides, when we consider the uniform *secrecy* which distinguishes all the meetings of Independents for matters of government, and the openness and publicity of the meetings of Presbyterians, and that the power which is given by Independency to the people in the church is similar to what is granted to them by the democracy in the state, and how ready they may be to transfer this spirit from the one to the other, is it not obvious that if any form of ecclesiastical government be formidable to the state, it must be that of Independency, and that Presbytery, from its beneficial consequences in this respect, must be entitled to the preference?

“ It is evident,” says Mr. Haldane, “ that no other kind of churches, than what is called *Independent*, can possibly be formed in *many* situations. Such an one is practicable in *all* circumstances where there are any believers. This affords no slight argument in favour of this mode of church order.” It affords however no stronger argument for this mode of *church-order*, than it would present for breaking down the political world into as many independent civil governments as there were towns or villages upon the face of the earth. And, in support of this, it might be contended with equal plausibility, “ that it is evident that no other kind of political governments but those of towns or villages can possibly be formed in *many* situations.— But such an one is practicable in *all* circumstances where there are any inhabitants.” Nay, it might even be proved upon this mode of arguing, that as in *many* situations, no more than a *family* can be found in a place, the primitive mode of political government by families is better than any other, and that there should be no superior administration, but as many distinct political governments as there are families in the world. But if this reasoning would be considered as completely inconclusive when applied to civil, must it not be equally inconclusive when applied by Mr. Haldane to ecclesiastical government? May not every thing, moreover, in the church of Christ, in *every* situation, be administered by the office-bearers, in opposition to the Independent plan, without soliciting the judgment of the members; and as soon as a sufficient number of churches is formed near them, or, even though at a distance, in connection with them, may not a court of review be established amongst them? Have not single congregations and Seceders in America, for example, been subject to the review of a Presbytery or Synod in Britain, and enjoyed, in addition to that congregational government which they had in themselves, the superadded advantage of their superintendence—a benefit which cannot be claimed by Independents?

“ It may be alleged,” says Mr. Haldane, p. 168, “ that if a church has not some body of men to controul it, they will be apt to act improperly and partially. All men are liable to err, and every church needs the constant care of the great Shepherd. But this care he ever exercises. He has promised to be in the midst of them when met in his name. If we view a church merely like

“ other societies, they may be considered to be equally  
 “ prone to err, and we may imagine it might be an advantage  
 “ to have unprejudiced persons to appeal to ; but as God  
 “ promised to Israel of old a special superintendence, so has  
 “ Jesus to his churches. It was never intended that they  
 “ should go on without it, and this is calculated to keep up  
 “ a spirit of dependence on himself, without which no church  
 “ can prosper.” But has not Jesus promised to Christians *individually*, as well as to churches, a special superintendence? Do not they err notwithstanding this? and do not Independents themselves grant to their congregations a power of controul, to correct these errors? But if Independents themselves find it necessary to vest a power of controul over particular christians in each of their congregations, notwithstanding the superintendence which Jesus has promised to these Christians individually, may not a similar power of controul be requisite over these congregations if they err, notwithstanding the superintendence which Jesus has promised to exercise over them? And if it is not inconsistent with that spirit of dependence on the blessed Jesus which individual Christians are called to manifest, that they should be subject to the authoritative review of a congregation, how can it be incompatible with the exercise of a similar dependence upon him by a congregation, that they should be subject to the review of a higher court?

If ordination, in short, consists, as Mr. Haldane contends, only in an appointment of a minister to a particular congregation, and if, as soon as he ceases to be the pastor of that congregation, he ceases to be a minister, on what principle can he be justified in exercising his office beyond that congregation? Why is he admitted, among Independents themselves, to join in ordaining the minister of a separate and distinct congregation? or why is he allowed to dispense the sacrament of the Lord's supper in a congregation where he is not pastor? Will not every reason which can be urged for his being a minister to a particular church only, and for his ceasing to be a minister as soon as he ceases to be the pastor of that society, prove also, that it must be unlawful for him to exercise his function beyond that individual church? In fine, “ if confessions of faith, of human  
 “ composition,” as Mr. Haldane maintains, p. 413, “ though  
 “ they promote an appearance of unity, do not produce  
 “ the reality—and if they tend to discourage the people



“ from searching the scriptures, by inducing a belief that  
“ they are too difficult for the unlearned, and that their  
“ summaries contain whatever is valuable in them,” why has  
Mr. Innes published lately one of *these summaries* for the  
benefit of young people, to prepare them for admission to  
the sacrament of the supper? Does Mr. Haldane here in-  
tend also to reprobate the summary which has been publish-  
ed by his brother? or rather, will he acknowledge as a bro-  
ther, a man who has lately written a book, the tendency of  
which, in his opinion, is to discourage the people from read-  
ing the scriptures?

THE END.

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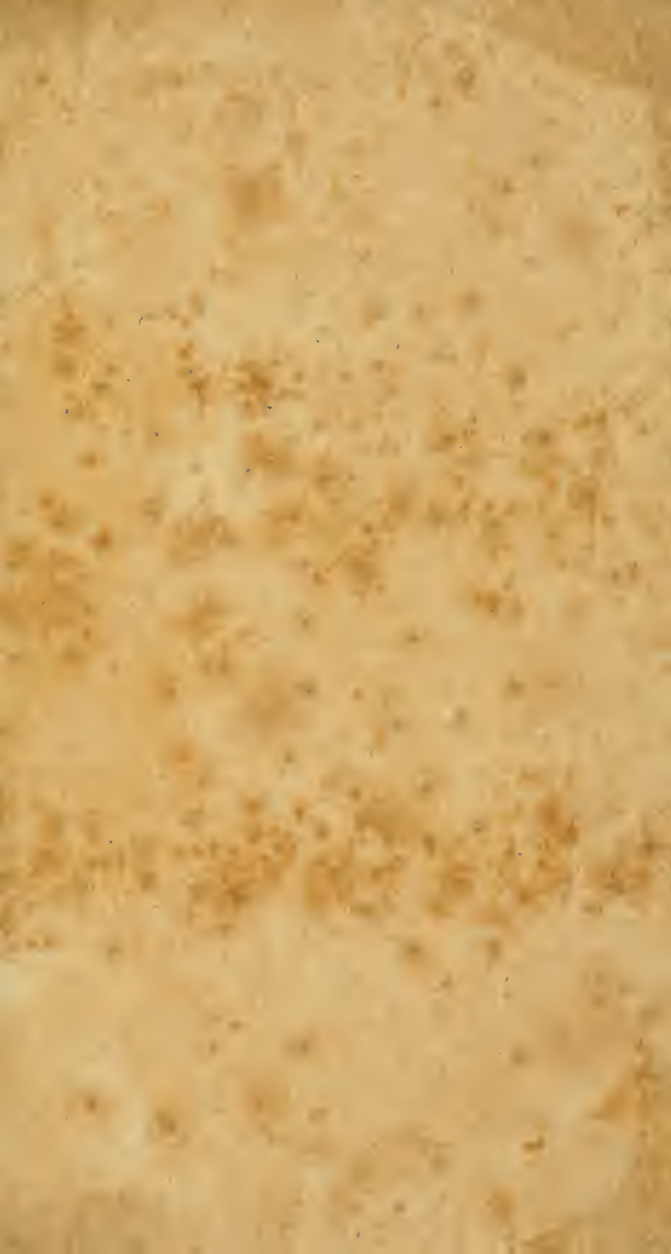
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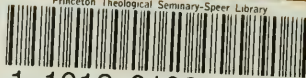
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